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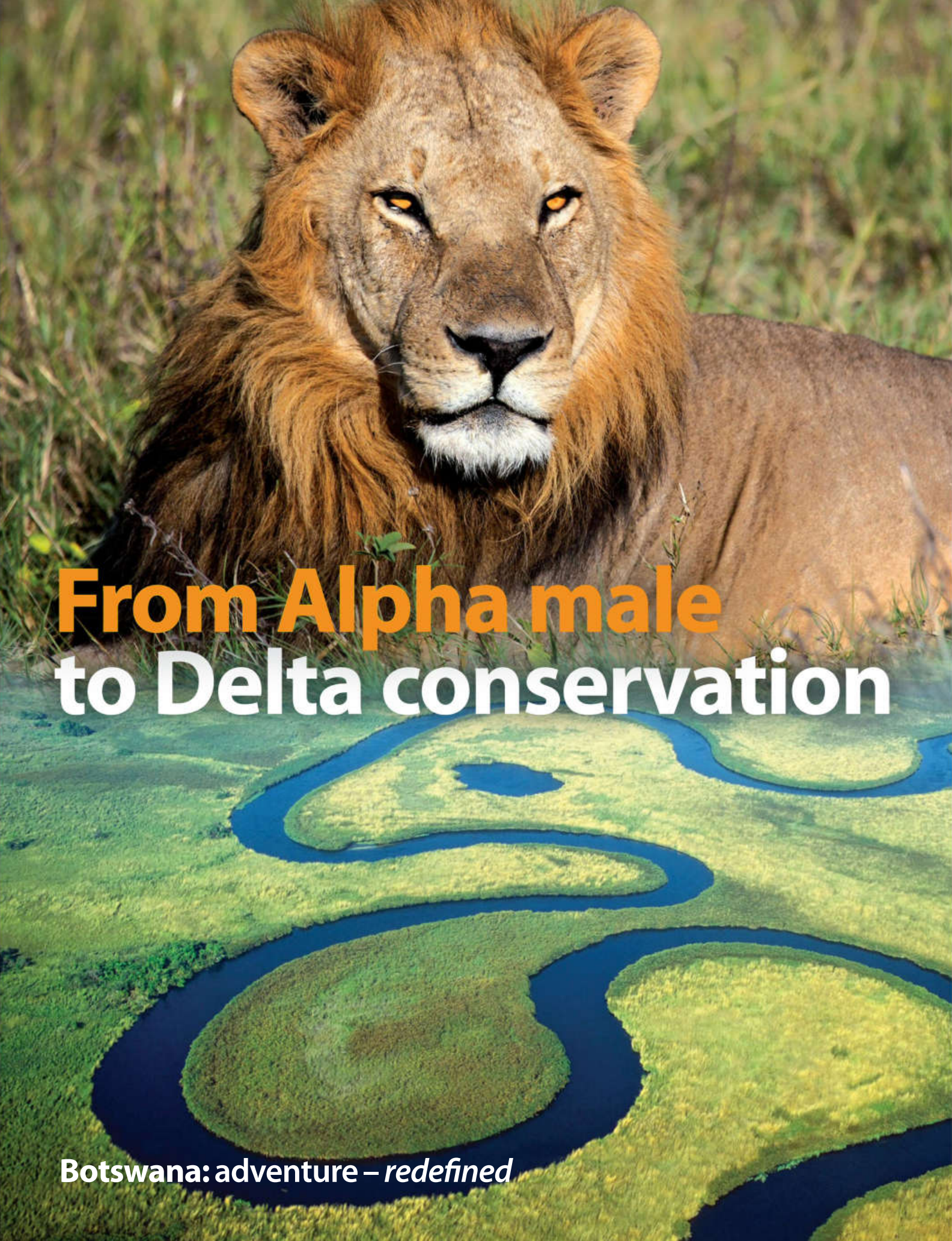


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The Okavango Delta has been declared the 1000th UNESCO World Heritage site

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Okavango Delta inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2014

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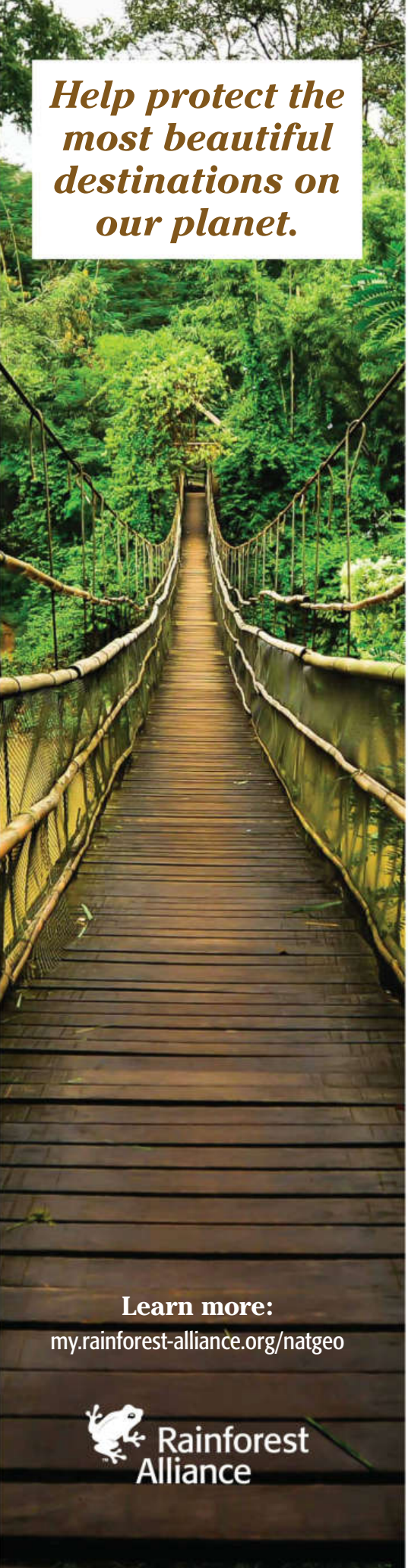
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A JOURNAL FOR THE SMART TRAVELER



Finland's Heat Index

Get the skinny on taking a dip in Scandinavia's sauna hot spot.

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ADVENTURE

The Sauna Effect

Getting steamy in Finland

On a wintry day in Kallio, a bohemian neighborhood in Helsinki, a group of Finns huddle outside on wooden benches, clad only in towels, steam rising from their bodies, drinking beer, relaxed. This is the conclusion of their ritual at Kotiharjun Sauna, a wood-heated sauna built in 1928 for local factory workers. Here and everywhere in Finland, Finns take their sauna experience seriously. In this Nordic country of 5.4 million, there are some 3.3 million saunas, in homes, offices, airport lounges, and even parliament. This may be the ultimate form of relaxation, but it's more than a way to soothe sore bodies. It's a sacred tradition that dates back thousands of years, with clear rules and a deeply embedded belief that saunas are central to what makes a Finn a Finn. "It's an essential part of our everyday life," says Jussi Niemela of the Finnish Sauna Society.

Whatever the setting, you begin in semidarkness while sitting naked. Water is tossed onto hot coals, producing steam *(löyly)*. A splash of cold water calms rising body temperatures, and a swat with birch branches improves circulation. But when the heat becomes too much, step outside for a roll in the snow or a dip in a lake. —STEVEN BESCHLOSS



Lämpimänä sauna's icy swimming hole in Tikkakoski, Finland

TESSA BUNNEY/EYEVINE/REDUX

Where to sauna like a Finn

LAKE DISTRICT
Jätkänkämppä
Housed in a former lumberjack lodge, the world's largest traditional smoke sauna also features live music.

HELSINKI
Kotiharjun
The suburban spa offers separate saunas for women, men, and families.

TAMPERE
Rajaportin
Dating to 1906, this is Finland's oldest public sauna still in use; an on-site café serves food.

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CENTENNIAL

National Treasures

A new book illustrates the story of "America's best idea."

Presidential wing tips at the Harry S. Truman historic site in Missouri (above); a badge at the Rosie the Riveter World War II Home Front park in California (bottom)

More than 400 sites make up the U.S. National Park Service, which celebrates its 100th birthday in 2016 amid much expected hoopla befitting what has often been called "America's best idea." But here's what just might be overshadowed in the hubbub: the parks themselves, particularly the lesser known ones, whose names don't roll smoothly off the public's tongue as does "Yellowstone" or "Yosemite" or "Grand Canyon." A new National Geographic book does homage to them all—in chronological order—and not surprisingly, with an abundance of arresting photos on a scale grand and small. *The National Parks: An Illustrated History* is a visual romp through more than a century of America's valiant, if imperfect, efforts to preserve its landscapes, wildlife, and cultural past. From the waters running through the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area ("dammed, channeled, leveed, diverted, polluted, and altered in countless other ways"), to Washington, D.C.'s Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, to the marine life of Alaska's Glacier Bay ("Time isn't on a wristwatch here"), the 368-page book is itself not a bad idea. —NORIE QUINTOS



COURTESY NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, MUSEUM MANAGEMENT PROGRAM AND HARRY S. TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE, HSTR 3887 (SHOES); COURTESY NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, ROSIE THE RIVETER/WWII HOME FRONT NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK PHOTOGRAPH, RORI 3165 (WOMAN)


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O holy night: sleepover at All Saints' Church in Aldwincle, England

CHECKING IN

SPIRITUAL SLUMBER PARTY

English churches offer a whole new kind of refuge.

Falling asleep in church has been frowned upon—until now. Thanks to the Churches Conservation Trust, four of England's historic churches become hallowed hostels by night. While "champing," or church camping, guests are given the holy houses' key for a candlelit night by the altar—just skip your Sunday best for a sleeping bag.

"It's a great way to commune with centuries of history, whilst escaping the push-button trappings of modern life," says Peter Aiers, Churches Conservation Trust director.

At the Gothic-style Church of St. Cyriac and St. Julitta in Swaffham Prior, near Cambridge, don't miss the octagonal bell tower, which features a set of six bells cast in 1791. Or, if the mood strikes, belt out a hymn or two; the acoustics are divine. In the village of Aldwincle in Northamptonshire, All Saints' Church, where 17th-century poet John Dryden was baptized, offers medieval limestone arcades and carved creatures on the facade.

In Swaffham and Aldwincle, guests sleep on the floor using inflatable or foldout beds. However, the All Saints' in West Stourmouth and the Church of St. Mary the Virgin in Fordwich both boast 18th-century box pews that can be transformed into cozy nooks. Highlights at St. Mary's also include 14th-century stained glass windows and the Fordwich Stone, a nearly six-foot-long, intricately carved shrine that's about 900 years old. —LANEE LEE

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YOUR SHOT

Stars and Cars

A reflection transforms a snap of small-town Montana.

While driving through Montana's Fort Benton, German photographer Carsten Bockermann hoped to showcase the previously prosperous town's Americana essence. Thanks to a flag displayed in a window across the street and a well-timed passing pickup truck, he brought new life to an abandoned building. "The photo conveys a bit of the atmosphere that is present in many small towns in America. And it does so in an almost romantic way," says Bockermann. "My goal was to grab the viewer by showing the situation in a style that makes them stop and wonder how this came about."

"Bockermann cleverly transformed a potentially bleak and unappealing spot into a colorful and celebratory look at the American West," says *Traveler*'s acting director of photography, Carol Enquist. "I love the combination of elements that just all fell into place—the low-angled, warm light bathing the building, the iconic pickup truck driving by, and, most important, the reflection of the stars from the American flag scattered perfectly over the whole scene."

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THE EXPLAINER

A Global Warm Welcome

Your guide to greeting etiquette around the world



BRAZIL
Brazilians greet newcomers with a handshake and strong eye contact; friends get a kiss on each cheek.



CUBA
In Cuba, it's a hearty handshake—but don't be surprised if you also get a hug and a kiss on the cheek.



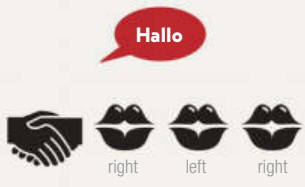
GREENLAND
Visitors should expect handshakes; the tradition of touching noses, or *kunik*, is reserved for loved ones.



INDIA
Press hands together and bow. Men and women don't touch unless they shake hands in a business setting.



MOROCCO
The general greeting is "*Salaam alaikum*—Peace be with you." Only individuals of the same sex shake hands.



NETHERLANDS
A handshake is used for professional greetings; friends exchange three kisses on alternate cheeks.



NEW ZEALAND
A common greeting is "*Kia ora*," often joined by a *hongi*, a pressing of noses to mix breath and spiritual energy.



SOUTH KOREA
Bow with your hands at your sides and say "*Annyeong haseyo*." Deeper bows convey more esteem.



THAILAND
Place your hands in a prayer position and slightly bow your head. The higher your hands, the more respectful.



NIGEL HOLMES

REPORTED BY LINDSAY SHAPKA

eye to eye

Durban

SOUTH AFRICA



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1936-1967 (Durban)

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BLACK DRAGON RIVER *By Dominic Ziegler* Ziegler recounts a rigorous journey along the rarely visited, 1,755-mile-long Amur River, which separates Russia's wild Far East from China's economically burgeoning northeast.

RECIPES FOR LOVE AND MURDER *By Sally Andrew* In this debut mystery novel (and cookbook), protagonist Tannie Maria is a cook turned recipe columnist whose innocent sleuthery uncovers a stew of passion and corruption in her rural South African hometown.

THE ONLY STREET IN PARIS *By Elaine Sciolino* From a hundred-year-old left-wing bookstore to a greengrocery owned by a Tunisian immigrant, former *New York Times* Paris bureau chief Sciolino celebrates her favorite street, the Rue des Martyrs. —DON GEORGE

FOR MORE BOOK REVIEWS, VISIT INTELLIGENTTRAVEL.NATIONALGEOGRAPHIC.COM.

FITNESS

AIRPORTS ON THE MOVE

Flight delayed? Long layover? Instead of waiting at the gate, you can pump iron, swim laps, or downward dog on a yoga mat without leaving the airport.

Worldwide, airports are helping travelers integrate fitness and well-being into their schedules. With on-site gyms, luggage storage, and workout clothing rentals, there's no excuse for not exercising.

Yoga studios reduce the stress of air travel in San Francisco, Dallas–Fort Worth, and Burlington, Vermont. Fliers can compete in table tennis between connections at the Milwaukee airport, or mentally prep for the crying baby on board in the San Diego airport's new meditation room, designed to echo the tranquillity of the ocean.

Some airports are flexing their muscles even more. Ice-skate indoors at Seoul's airport, or bike and in-line skate in the Zürich airport. Practice butterfly strokes in Dubai's or Munich's indoor pools, or unwind in the rooftop hot tub at Singapore's airport. New York's JFK also recently unveiled a rooftop park, 4,046 square feet of green space that includes a dog area and children's playground—all with a view of the Manhattan skyline.

—KATRINA WOZNICKI



MONTE COSTA/PHOTO RESOURCE HAWAII (CANOE), BECKY HALE/NGS (BOOK), SERG MYSHKOVSKY/ISTOCKPHOTO (YOGA MAT)



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@KDKUIPER, BANGKOK | Amazon asked if I'd bring the Kindle Paperwhite on my trip to Thailand. After wandering the crowded streets of Bangkok, I found my way to the floating market on the Chao Phraya river and got lost in the Sonchai Jitpleecheep series.

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FOOD & DRINK

French Finds

Six delicacies to bring back to your pantry

Extra room in your new Longchamp bag? American chef and author David Lebovitz, who lives in Paris, recommends some of his favorite edible souvenirs to stock your larder or give as gifts. And though these goodies hail from different regions in France, they typically are found in Paris food shops at affordable prices (check any Monoprix grocery store), evoking a taste of the country long after you arrive home. —SUSAN O'KEEFE



CHOCOLATE

THROUGHOUT FRANCE

Anything from the bean-to-bar chocolate maker Bernachon in Lyon is worth the two-hour train ride from Paris.



FLEUR DE SEL

BRITTANY

Standard in French kitchens, this flaky salt is formed by the sea and sun, and hand-harvested from marshes.



PRUNES

AGEN

Nothing like grandma's, these partially dried prunes from Gascony are "deeply chocolaty in flavor," says Lebovitz.



LOCAL HONEY

THROUGHOUT FRANCE

Sample varieties of this golden treat at local markets. Brittany's musky, buckwheat flower honey is the crown jewel.



ESPELETTE PEPPER

ESPELETTE

Ground from chili peppers grown in the Basque countryside, these mild, fragrant flakes enhance most dishes.



DIJON MUSTARD

BEAUNE

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BECKY HALE AND MARK THIESSEN/NGS (ALL PHOTOS)

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MY CITY

LIGHTS, CAMERA, LOS ANGELES

BY MICKEY RAPKIN

I came to think of Los Angeles as the magic place—a city where beautiful people from our movie screens and television sets ran wild. Or at least ran errands. There was Marisa Tomei at the Echo Park Crafts Fair on a Saturday morning. There was "Sulu" from the new *Star Trek* films weightlifting at my neighborhood gym. I once was introduced to Matthew Weiner, the creator of *Mad Men,* at a fancy Hollywood party. He told me I had a great name.

"It sounds like a Jewish gangster," he said. I dined out on that story for months.

After a decade in New York City working as a journalist, I had moved west in 2013 to write movies. Los Angeles was a company town and, man, was the company good. (Matthew Weiner!) I wasn't alone. The Style section of the *New York Times* chronicled a mass creative exodus from Brooklyn to L.A.'s east side. Though John Lennon, it's said, once referred to my adopted home as "just a big parking lot," L.A. was apparently now "irresistible to the culturally attuned."

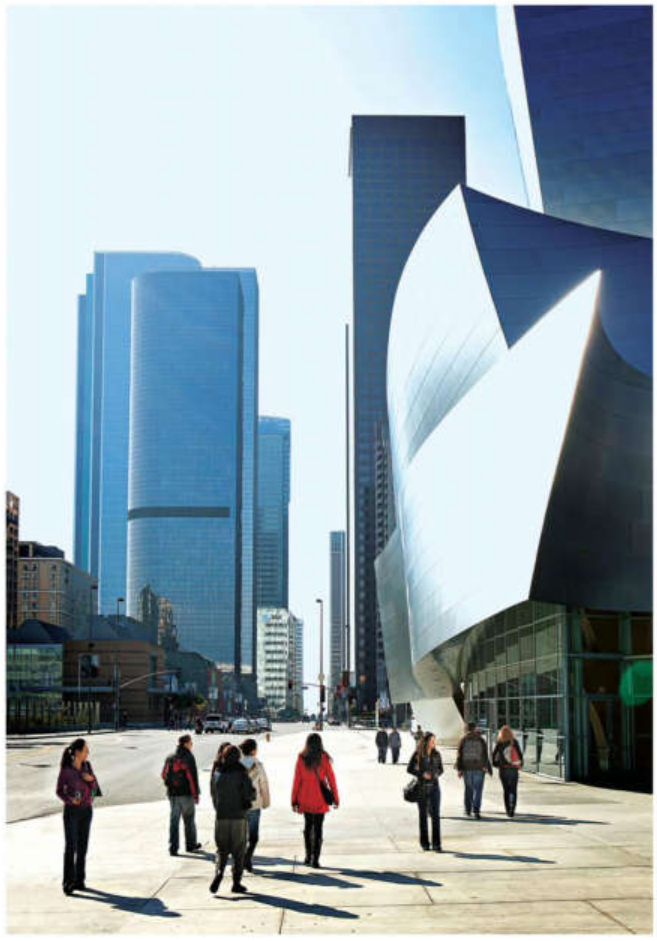
I was so convinced of my screenwriter mission that I bought a two-bedroom house with an apricot tree in the backyard. I literally had roots in L.A., but after six months I still wasn't sure I belonged here. My complaints were hardly original. Early dinners, nobody walks. When the novelty of a good celebrity sighting wore off, what were you left with? Strip malls and doughnut shops. I went to the artist Jenny Yurshansky's exhibition "Blacklisted: A Planted Allegory" at nearby Pitzer College, where she used 130 species of invasive plants as a way to talk about immigration. I left feeling like a non-native plant myself. There were a million cars on

To live and dine in L.A.: exotic iced lattes at G&B Coffee, in Grand Central Market (top left); French-inspired fare and rooftop views at Perch, in the revived downtown district (bottom left); Santa Monica sunset (opposite)

DYLAN + JENI (MAN), JESSICA SAMPLE (BAR, BICYCLISTS)







Left: Raan and Shea Parton, brothers and founders of L.A. menswear brand Apolis; right: downtown anchor Disney Concert Hall

the road, but nobody was in a rush to get anywhere. Where was the urgency?

I have a theory about why L.A. is the No Worries capital of the world—and why that just might be a blessing for anyone as tightly wound as I am. By the time Angelenos wake up, the rest of the world has already had a full day. Anything terrible that was going to happen probably happened while you were asleep. *Namaste.* New Yorkers like to believe they live in the center of the universe. But once you leave, the world opens up in surprising ways. Slowly, Los Angeles's secrets began to reveal themselves.

This is a city that likes a good story. Nowhere more so than downtown. With some regularity I started going to The Varnish, a speakeasy hidden inside Cole's, one of two sandwich shops that claim to be the birthplace of the French dip (the other is Philippe's). As one legend has it, the French dip was invented to appease a customer with sore gums who found his sandwich's French roll too crusty; dipping it in beef *jus* made it easier to chew. Who knows if this is true, but it sounds true. Which in Hollywood, you'll quickly realize, is the same thing. On Sunday nights, I walk clear through Cole's toward an unmarked wooden door at the back of the eatery. It's less a door than a time machine, opening to reveal a secret windowless bar lit low and (yeah, I said it) romantic. Pick your favorite spirit and let a bartender mix a serious cocktail while a bass player entertains the tiny crowd. What makes the drinks so good? It starts with hand-cut ice.

Now I admit there is something twee about a world that is so curated. (Bespoke ice!) But I also appreciate the irony. This town famous for exporting mind-numbing action sequels around the world has a culinary movement firmly about authenticity and buying hyper-local. That's what makes the Grand Central Market so electric. Over the past two years, its owner, Adele Yellin—a petite, 60-something firecracker—has transformed a century-old downtown food court into a culinary destination, a place where longtime *pupusa* vendors coexist with such upstart foodie operations as Eggslut and G&B Coffee (home of the iced almond/macadamia milk latte). In a city obsessed with the perfect hamburger, there is no better fix for my $12.50 than Belcampo Meat Co., an organic California farm that operates a lunch counter out of the market.

JESSICA SAMPLE (MENSWEAR), 13 PHOTO/REDUX (CONCERT HALL)





Left: lunch at Silver Lake's Sqirl, known for its jam-topped brioche toast; right: multicultural culinary destination Grand Central Market

DYLAN + JENI (PLATES, MARKET)

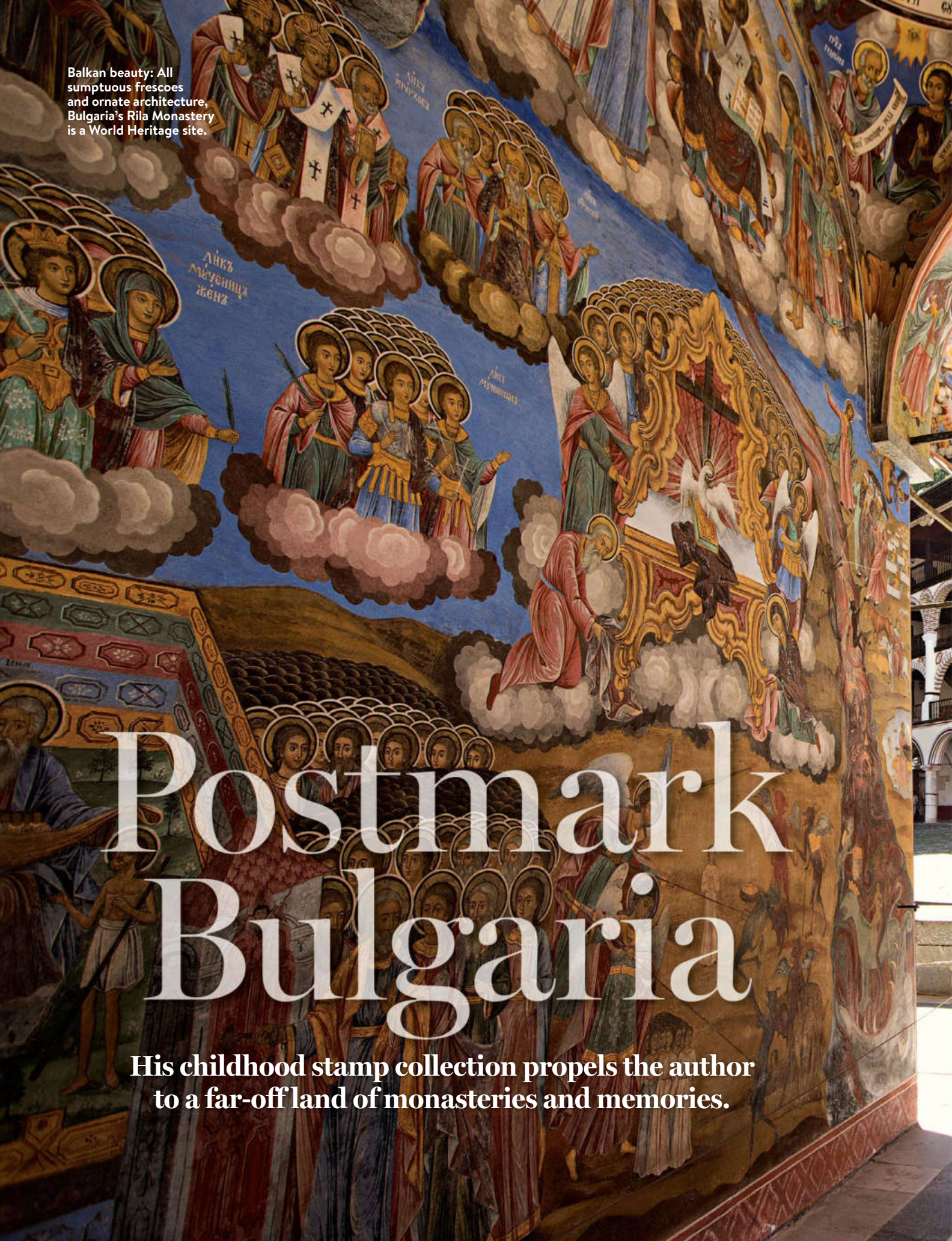
Belcampo's patties, a handsome butcher told me, are made with trims from the house's best cuts. Remember to bring a towelette to wipe the juice off your fingers. Better yet, just lick them.

For a while I thought nobody in L.A. ever really worked. (I still don't, but that's another conversation.) With no reason to rush, you can get to know the entrepreneur brave enough to open an 800-square-foot café that stakes its reputation on one thing: toast. At tiny Sqirl, wedged between beauty shops and bodegas in hip Silver Lake, the lunchtime line stretches out the door and around the corner, with people waiting for owner Jessica Koslow to slather house-made wild blackberry and Meyer lemon jam all the way to the edge of a thick slice of brioche. For $4.50, it tastes like an elementary-school snow day. We're all just nuts trying to get a Sqirl.

The thing is, in L.A. we crave authenticity not only in food but in our experiences. It turns out that writing movies is more stressful than I imagined. I began seeking solace in an unexpected place: a Korean bath. These oases are hidden along Wilshire Boulevard, but I am partial to Natura Spa, a budget-friendly escape in the basement of a former department store in Koreatown. Fifteen dollars gets you entry to a steam room, sauna, and soaking tubs. The lights are dim. The conversation (if any) never rises above a hum. If you go, a tip: Move from the dry heat of the sauna to the wet heat of the steam room before plunging into an icy bath. And let the folds of your brain relax.

Even as I write this, I know how L.A. it sounds. A hippie trip to a subterranean spa? Brioche toast? And I'm not ready to call myself an Angeleno. I miss New York like a phantom limb; there's an attitude forever embedded in my DNA despite my zip code. But I breathe a little easier here despite the smog. I eat a little better. I have come to appreciate Los Angeles for a million reasons and also for one: Did I mention the light? Damn, it's gorgeous. Sometimes that light makes you see how lonely you are. Or how successful other people are. Or even how famous they are. But on a good day, that light can also make you feel hopeful.

MICKEY RAPKIN *is the author of* Pitch Perfect, *which inspired the hit film franchise from Universal and Gold Circle.*



Balkan beauty: All sumptuous frescoes and ornate architecture, Bulgaria's Rila Monastery is a World Heritage site.

Postmark Bulgaria

His childhood stamp collection propels the author to a far-off land of monasteries and memories.







Sheepskin hats and elaborate embroidery dress up celebrants on Bulgarian Unification Day.

BY **ANDREW NELSON**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **AARON HUEY**

It's

my backside that feels Bulgaria first, through the seat of a taxi as it speeds over cobblestones in the capital city, Sofia. "This country is like the Piccadilly Circus!" my taxi driver exclaims in rough, if enthusiastic, English. "Everyone comes here. Goes round and round!" He removes both hands from the steering wheel to illustrate Bulgaria as the whirlpool of civilizations. I picture us plowing into the church looming suddenly, like a glittering Christmas ornament, in our windshield.

What he says is trenchant: Everyone, it seems, has come to Bulgaria. The Thracians, with their gold. Rome, with its legions. The Asiatic Bulgars, the country's namesake. Also Huns, Slavs, Jews, Turks, with their many traditions. In the past two decades they've been joined by hordes of holidaying Brits with a thirst for cheap beer and a good time.

I've come with old postage stamps.

THE ATTIC FAN rumbles in a Michigan house, sucking out the humidity of a muggy June day as three ten-year-old boys sift through a hillock of stamps at a table.

"Purple Liz," my brother, Fred, says, dropping the British queen atop the heap of empire.

"Pink head," blurts my friend Shawn; it's our name for the portrait of Belgian King Baudouin.

My turn. "Another orange Franco," I mutter glumly. What I really want us to look at are the colorful images in the smallest pile, for Bulgaria, a country at the time sequestered behind



Ancient Rome left a mark on Plovdiv, including stone walls built when the city was a provincial Roman capital.

the Iron Curtain. Its stamps are large, with faraway scenes of craggy mountain ranges, ancient hill towns, dueling knights. The one that most intrigues me shows a richly decorated monastery that could be out of a book I'm reading about dwarves, elves, and castles in a place called Middle-earth. Bulgaria, with its wild landscape, exotic people, rugged fortifications, and runic Cyrillic lettering, has become, in my imagination, a land from *The Hobbit*.

I'll travel there someday, I know then, and find that monastery.

IT'S ALMOST MIDNIGHT when the taxi pulls up to my hotel. I pay the driver, who then he roars off into the night, his open window trailing notes of *chalga,* electrified Bulgarian folk music. I look around. Dark windows on belle epoque facades stare back. Then I notice something familiar about the building across the street—the bulkiness of its neoclassic exterior, its spire thrusting upward like a Stalinist spindle. I rifle through my stamp envelope, excited. The miniature engraving I extract, tinted a Marxist red, is identical to what sits in front of me: Sofia's old Communist Party headquarters. My stamps and I are off to a good start.

I meet my Bulgarian translator, 25-year-old Polina Simeonova, the next morning. She looks like the dark-haired ballerina on my stamp of a Bulgarian ballet duet, though thoroughly 21st century with her smartphone and jeans.

"Everyone under age 30 here learned English watching the Cartoon Network," she reassures me. "Trust me."

We plunge into Sofia, a city of more than a million that has all the pediments and pillars, pastel colors and classical details of a proper Old World capital, spiced with Ottoman touches, a vestige of what Bulgarians refer to as the "Turkish Yoke." The Turkic Ottoman Empire conquered the Empire of Bulgaria at the end of the 1300s; the land would form part of the Ottoman dominion for 500 years, endowing Sofia with Islamic mosques, minarets, filigree, and a hammam, or Turkish bath. A more recent empire endowed Sofia with another architecture: large apartment blocks, now coated with soot and spray paint.

"See? Soviet architecture and American graffiti," Simeonova deadpans. She also points out the new, thrusting office towers clad in glass and capitalist sass, a reflection of Bulgaria's accession in 2007 to the European Union.

As Simeonova shows me her hometown, I spot another landmark pictured on my stamps. The multidomed Cathedral of St. Alexander Nevsky, a glorious stratocumulus of neo-Byzantine cloud, billows up in front of me, unchanged from the image I pull out. A small group of families stands gathered around a tour guide, who recites the facts. Construction started in 1882; the cathedral commemorates the 1877-78 Russo-Turkish War; with more than 34,000 square feet, the building accommodates 10,000 worshippers.

A father reaches out to gently realign his son's head toward the guide. "Listen," his gesture says. "This is important."

I'm beginning to regret that I've allowed only one day in Sofia; eager to see as much of Bulgaria as possible, I have packed a lot onto my itinerary. Simeonova and I hoof it to different neighborhoods, where she introduces me to vendors selling cupfuls of fat raspberries, like a pasha's collection of rubies; points out skateboarders busy "shredding" at the base of the gray Soviet War Memorial, whose stone soldiers were repainted in 2011 as comic-book heroes (that didn't last); and treats me to a *chopska* salad, a mix of onions, peppers, tomatoes, and cucumbers complemented by fresh, tangy farm cheese. As I wolf it down, she eyes me and wryly comments, "You'll have plenty of chopska tomorrow, in Veliko Turnovo."

A TWO-AND-A-HALF-HOUR drive east from Sofia the next day brings me to the setting for another of my stamps, a place Bulgarians consider a national icon: the Tsarevets fortress, a stronghold that protected the town of Veliko Turnovo, capital of the Second Bulgarian Empire, until it succumbed to Ottoman invaders in 1393. My stamp shows a huge walled compound being fought over with palpable ferocity by medieval knights.

When I cruise into Veliko Turnovo, today a city of more than 68,000 people that hugs the steep hillsides of the Stara Planina mountains like a Slavic Mesa Verde, I'm in a pensive mood. The siege of the Tsarevets fortress lasted three months and ended with Turkish forces conquering and destroying the redoubt, according to my stamp. The capital's inhabitants were mostly killed or sent into exile.

The fortress I enter today, a bastion of stone walls and towers, was reconstructed in the 20th century. Battlements surround the great keep, which rises straight from rock cliffs flanking the Yantra River. Atop the hill sits a small church. I climb its bell tower and emerge to a view of steep hillsides and dizzying gorges—the very landscape on my stamp! To my right, I make out the streets of Veliko Turnovo, lined with 200-year-old town houses. It is near one of these that I come upon antiques for sale, like a display of Bulgarian history: samovars, Turkish tiles, a bust of Vladimir Lenin, and a rusted alarm clock with a familiar, if fading, design on its face—the five Olympic rings. Behind them loom the words "Berlin 1936" and a swastika. It's a souvenir from Adolf Hitler's infamous Summer Games.

"You like it?" The inquiry comes from behind me. "I give you good price."

"No thanks." I set the clock back down. Bulgaria was a reluctant ally of Germany in World War II; faced with the threat of a Nazi invasion, it signed a pact in 1941. That year, Germany forced it to declare war on America; in 1943, the U.S. bombed Sofia, destroying much of the city and killing more than a thousand people. Interestingly, despite being Nazi allies officially, Bulgarians saved many Jewish citizens. As with everything in this strategically located land, its history is complicated.

A MORE DISTANT HISTORY, and another stamp, transport me to Bulgaria's second largest city, Plovdiv, southwest of Veliko Turnovo. Tracing its settlement back 6,000 years, Plovdiv—slated to be a European Capital of Culture in 2019—may be best known for what an expanding Roman empire left behind, including a series of arcaded aqueducts and a good-as-new



NG MAPS; PARKS DATA FROM THE WORLD DATABASE ON PROTECTED AREAS (WDPA)





Kitted out in traditional garb, a bagpipe player (left) waits to perform at a Plovdiv wedding. Market wares in the old town of Veliko Turnovo include an item that intrigued the author: a clock (above) decorated with a swastika and five colored rings to commemorate the 1936 Berlin Olympics.


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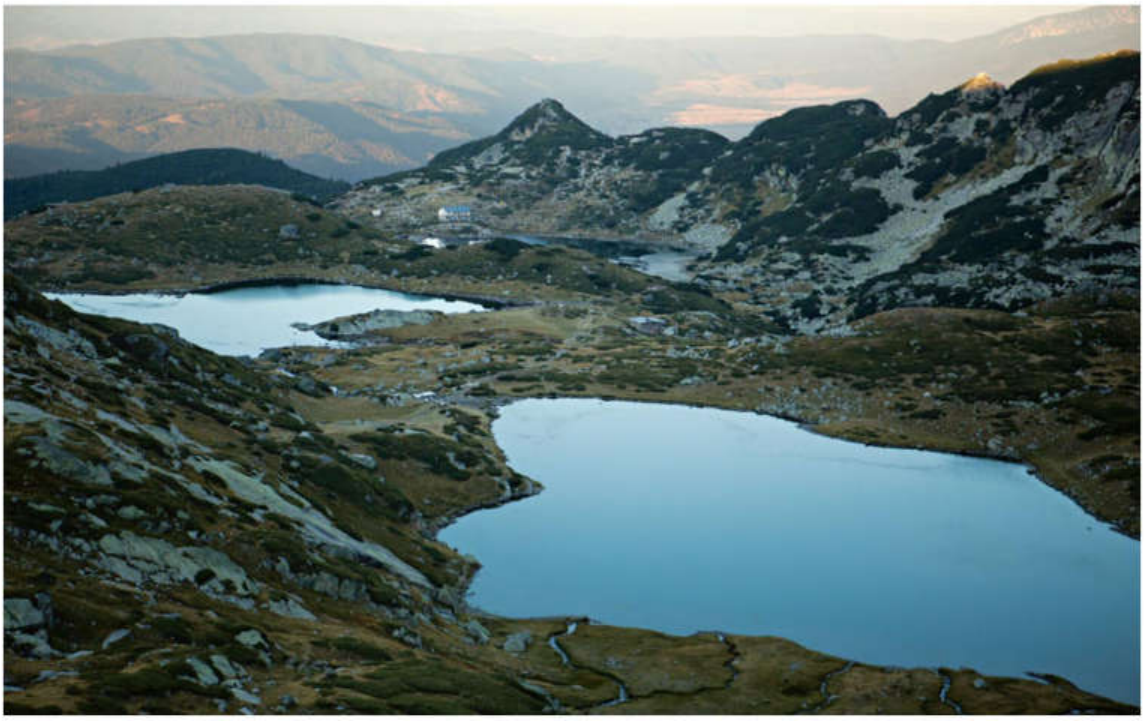
Vestige of a bygone political order, the Buzludzha Monument was a tribute to the birth of Bulgaria's socialist movement.

Roman amphitheater in the Old Town.

"They say the acoustics here were so exact, you could drop a coin on stage and it would be heard in the back row," says a mustachioed Bulgarian in English as I step onto the temporary wooden floorboards. Around us, a perfect half circle of white marble tiers stacked like sugar cubes rises, attesting to the wealth that once flowed through this land. Built by Emperor Trajan in the second century, when the city was a major Roman settlement, the theater hosts performances to this day. I watch attendants place cushions on the seats for tonight's show, the Verdi opera *Nabucco*.

Shuffling through my stamps of Plovdiv, I find a set of intriguing half-timbered houses in the cobblestoned Old Town, my next stop. Built mostly in the 1800s by rich businessmen, the houses sport coats of vivid blues, purples, and ochers. Knockers of braided iron hang on oak doors. I enter one residence, a museum known as the House of Nikola Nedkovich, to find ornate wood furniture and embroidered fabrics that speak to the flowering of a native pride suppressed by the Ottomans.

Making my way from the Old Town to Plovdiv's main avenue, Tsar Battenberg Boulevard (named for the first regent of modern Bulgaria), I pass the 15th-century Dzhumaya Mosque, one of the oldest Ottoman religious structures in the Balkans. Its geometrically patterned minaret appears on one of my stamps, and I dearly want to see the sumptuous interior, with its floral flourishes and quotes from the Koran. But the shadow on the mosque's sundial reads 4 p.m., giving me just a few more hours of daylight to wander town, joining the pedestrian crowds as they stroll past restored 19th-century buildings and fountains. Taking in the swarms of fashionable men and women, their eyes hidden behind designer sunglasses, I become a boulevardier in what the first-century Greek writer Lucian dubbed "the largest and most beautiful of all cities."



The Rila Mountains (above), shaped by glaciers and dotted with lakes, form the backbone of Bulgaria's largest national park. Cellar sips: Oenophiles (below) enjoy a taste of Bulgaria's southern wine region.



As I step into Rila Monastery's inner courtyard, I'm flung into another era. The transition feels almost physical, like a shove back to the Middle Ages.

THAT NIGHT I SPREAD my stamps on my hotel bed and zero in on one I've saved, like dessert. It depicts Rila, my Middle-earth monastery—and tomorrow's destination. Guided by a GPS navigator I nickname "Garminovka," I'll head west of Plovdiv on a three-hour drive into the Rila Mountains, the highest peaks between the Alps and the Caucasus range. I'm beyond eager to see the real version of the monastery that so seized my imagination as a ten-year-old.

I make good time until the road begins to narrow and trees grow dense. Garminovka starts babbling. "Recalculating," she finally says, then lapses into silence. I've come into a deep, wooded valley. Yellow butterflies pirouette across the road, and the sound of the rushing Rilska River overpowers the engine's grumble. In the distance, I make out mountains, dizzyingly steep and felted in a sage green. They greet me as they did pilgrims and monks in the tenth century, when the original monastery was founded by Ivan (John) of Rila, a hermit who would become Bulgaria's patron saint.

Ivan chose his site well. The complex, a quadrangle walled on all sides by monastery buildings, sits on a wooded knoll in the middle of nature. I park, then walk past a knot of Japanese tourists to traverse the passage connecting to the inner courtyard. As I step through under a bright noonday sun, I'm flung into another era. The transition feels almost physical, a shove back to the Middle Ages.

My stamp depicts the monastery only in outline; the reality that faces me is an explosion of columns, arches, crosses, and carved wooden balconies in rich reds and umbers and charcoals—an apotheosis of "Bulgarian renaissance" architecture. In the center of it all rises the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption, fronted by columns striped black and white in the Islamic Mamluk tradition. I step under the cathedral's portico and find detailed frescoes of the glories of heaven and the terrors of hell. A bearded monk in black robes and cap appears to be the cathedral's gatekeeper. I pause. May I enter? He nods his assent.

The cathedral's cool interior, all gilded icons and vivid frescoes of biblical scenes and haloed saints, glows softly in candlelight. It is a lot to take in. As my eyes adjust to the darkened space, I notice other visitors, who have assembled around something towering up front—a magnificent (that is the only word for it) gold-plated iconostasis that soars some 30 feet, a 19th-century work by a master craftsman from Thessaloniki.



The stamp that launched a Balkan journey

Next to me, a man starts to genuflect, his face serene with worship. I am a stranger to Eastern Orthodox ritual, but his piety needs no translation. This is a holy place, so holy to Bulgarians that when a fire destroyed it in the early 1800s, it was meticulously rebuilt. During the centuries of Ottoman rule, the monastery became a powerful symbol of Bulgarian identity and a major destination for pilgrims from the greater Balkans.

The opulence of the cathedral, I soon discover, contrasts with the simplicity of the monks' white-walled quarters, where bed sheets are hung out to dry and water is scooped from a stone fountain. As I use the dented ladle to get water to wash my hands, I think of how my Rila stamp had seemed a talisman that illuminated an alternate world. The real thing is proving far more powerful. Symbols are important, but it's the details of everyday life—this metal ladle, the man genuflecting, the bright chattering of the Rilska River—that have brought Bulgaria alive for me.

BACK IN SOFIA, before my flight home, Polina Simeonova and I meet to share a farewell walk through tree-lined Borisova Gradina, or Boris's Garden, the capital's equivalent of New York City's Central Park. The sun is hot, so we've chosen a shaded path. As we stroll, I notice what look like bracelets of red and white yarn dangling from tree limbs.

"Martenitsa, the last pagan tradition we have," Simeonova explains. "The colors red and white signify the coming of spring—for us a time of hope and renewal—so on March 1 we wear woven red-and-white bracelets. When we spot the first stork returning from its wintering grounds, or the first flowering tree, we remove the bracelet and place it on a branch so our wishes will come true."

I laugh. I have one stamp that hasn't been matched on my journey into Bulgaria. It depicts beachgoers sunning along Bulgaria's Black Sea coast, which was too far for me to visit this time. Consider it my wish for the future, I say to my young guide—with postage due.

Contributing editor **ANDREW NELSON** *returned from Bulgaria a fan of its red wines. Contributing photographer* **AARON HUEY**, *who is based in Seattle, also shoots for* National Geographic *magazine.*

TOP PICKS

GOING LOCAL IN BULGARIA

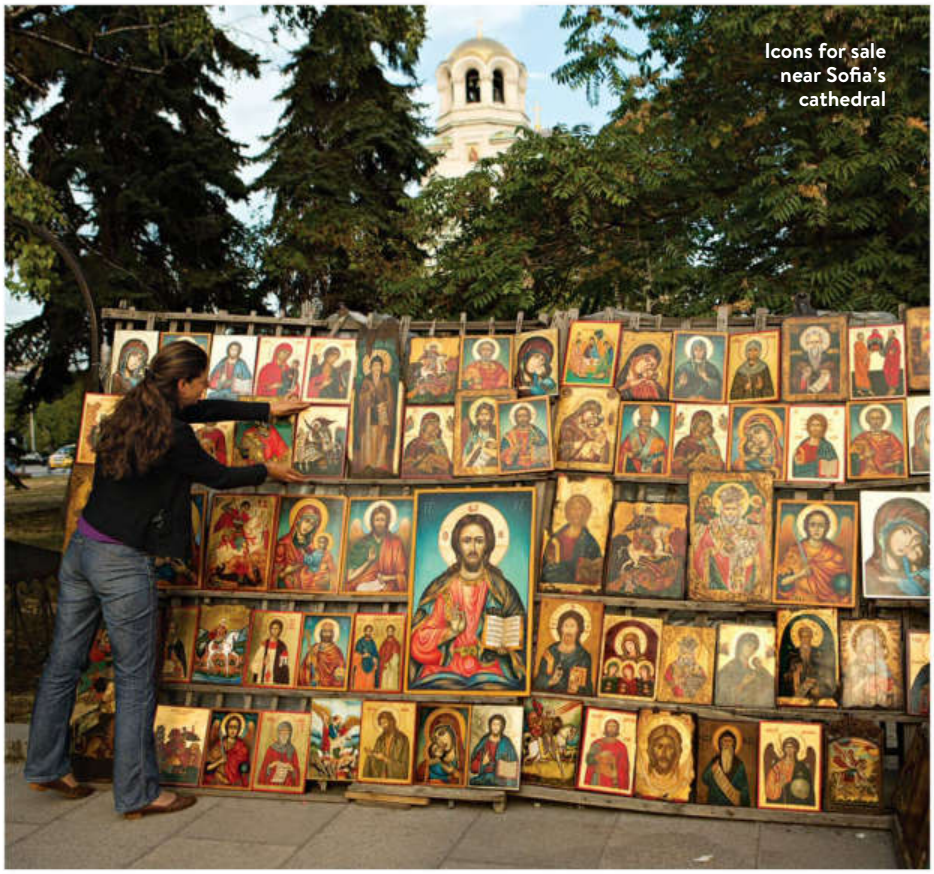
TO MARKET Browse vintage artifacts, icons, nesting dolls, and more at the antiques market near Sofia's Alexander Nevsky Cathedral. Prepare to haggle for what catches your fancy.

PARK IT HERE Just south of Rila National Park—almost an extension of it—is Pirin National Park, and its resort town, Bansko, where visitors hike, bike, and ski. Lodgings include the luxe Kempinski Grand Hotel Arena, but increasingly popular are stays in centuries-old farm homes.

GOLD DIGGER The Thracians, who inhabited ancient Bulgaria, had a way with gold. See their handiwork—including a golden mask of Thracian King Teres, discovered in 2004—at Sofia's National Institute of Archaeology.

HISTORY IN STONE Famous for vivid frescoes, the Rock-Hewn Churches of Ivanovo—scores of chapels and sanctuaries carved out of hillsides by hermits in the 1100s—have earned World Heritage status. One church currently is open to the public.

FOR THE BIRDS Bulgaria's mix of landscapes—fields, marshes, mountains, seashore—attracts hundreds of bird species. View raptors in the lofty Central Balkan National Park and seabirds in Srebarna Nature Reserve's wetlands.



Icons for sale near Sofia's cathedral

SHORE EXCURSION

Sea, Sand, and Sights

Beachgoers flock in summer to Bulgaria's Black Sea Riviera, popular for its 235-mile coast and family resorts. Also here: the millennia-old city of Nesebur, which was built on a stony promontory in Thracian times. Conquered by the Greeks—whose acropolis remains—it later became a significant Byzantine settlement centered around a still standing basilica.



Black Sea beacon: Ahtopol Lighthouse

SOUVENIR

Rose Oil

Most of the world's rose oil comes from Bulgaria. Visitors can buy rose products at Shipka, an "organics" shop in Sofia, and the Rose Museum, in the town of Kazanlak.

LODGING

Arena di Serdica

Stay atop Roman history at Arena di Serdica, a Sofia hotel built over Roman ruins uncovered during construction; 63 rooms, starting at $90.

FLAVOR

Breakfast Bun

Start the day with a *banitsa*, a pastry of phyllo dough filled with an eggy cheese mixture.

EVENT

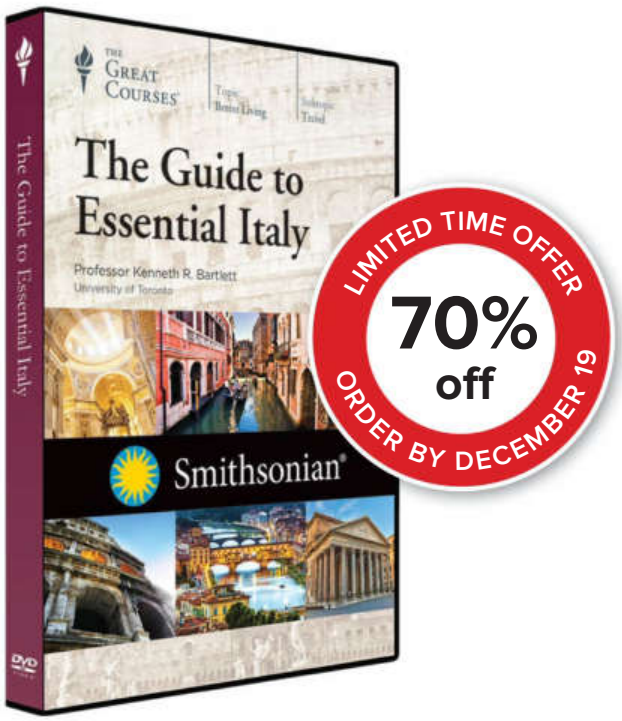
Unification Day

Bulgaria's national day, September 6, is celebrated with fireworks and parades.

AARON HUEY (BOTH PHOTOS)

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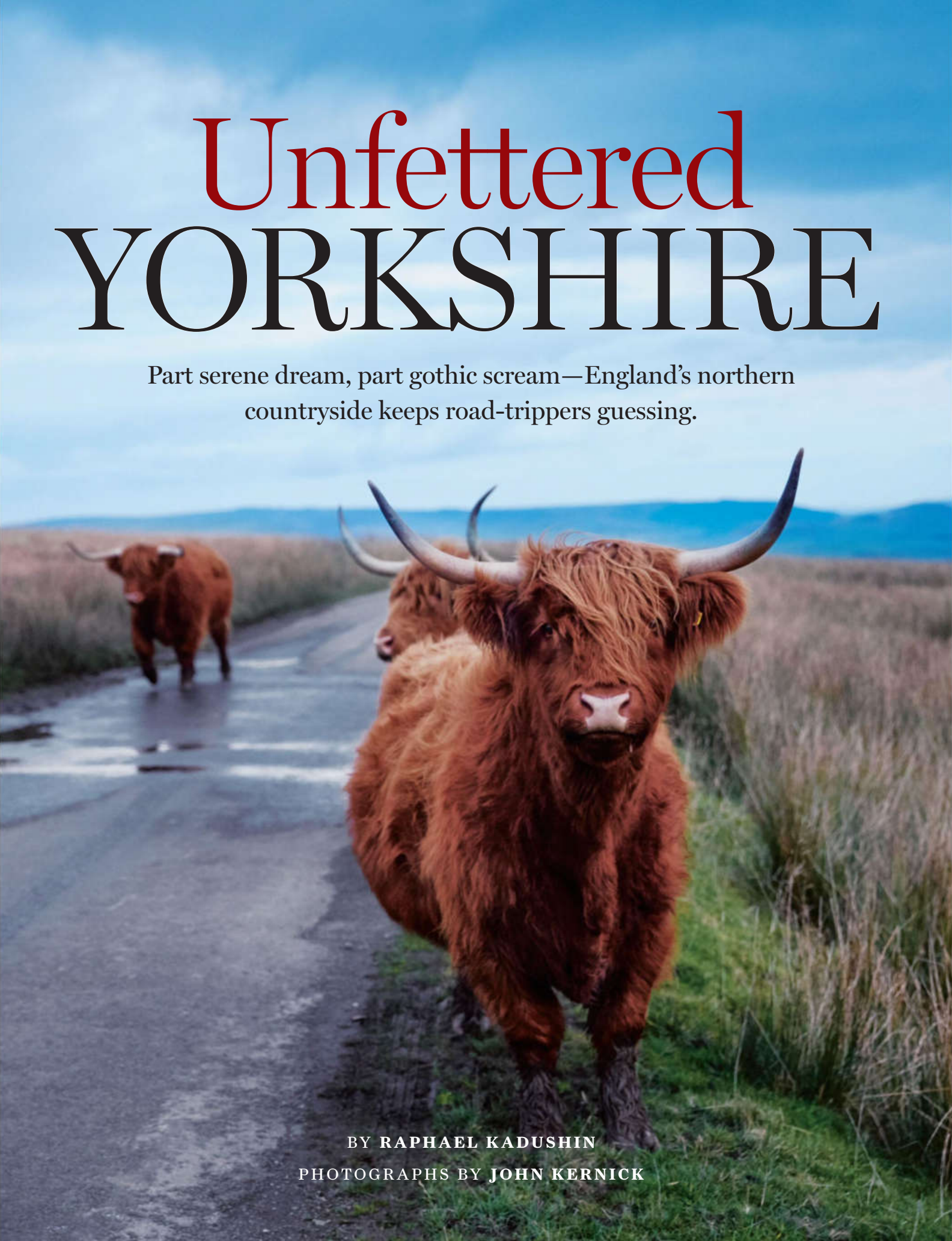
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Unfettered YORKSHIRE

Part serene dream, part gothic scream—England's northern countryside keeps road-trippers guessing.



BY **RAPHAEL KADUSHIN**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **JOHN KERNICK**



The market town of Helmsley, England, abuts the North York Moors. Left: Highland cows amble a country road.

Just about 15 minutes west of York, at the start of my drive across Yorkshire, I realize I have entered deep English country. The hints are hard to miss. There is the billboard advertising the local chimney sweep. There is the lamb, the sheep, and eventually the whole flock wandering across the road. And then there are the signs I pass for Gordale Scar ravine and Stump Cross Caverns, brooding place-names that seem to telegraph a spooky world ahead.

In fact, that is exactly what I am hoping for. Yorkshire played haunted muse to the Brontë sisters and Bram Stoker, whose 19th-century gothic fiction remains fixed in our collective imagination. Now more than ever: Scratch the surface of any popular contemporary fantasy, from the *Twilight* saga to *True Blood,* and you find the direct descendants of Emily Brontë's Heathcliff, Stoker's Dracula, and all the vampires, wraiths, and undead that materialized on Yorkshire's moors.

So I have come to England to drive from the Yorkshire Dales, through the North York Moors, and on to the east coast for the pure fun of scaring myself a little. I'm also here to understand why some of our deepest nightmares took hold in this homey shire of tearooms and follies.

MY FIRST STOP is Haworth, 50 miles west of York. Here in the first half of the 19th century, the three Brontë sisters imagined a world of demonic villains, madwomen in the attic, and dispossessed spirits in such novels as *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights.*

The Brontë family parsonage sits at the top of the hilly town. Once I park my rental car and climb the stony spine of Haworth's main street, what immediately strikes me is how swallowed up the home appears. Photos show the house framed by a few small graves. But in reality the cemetery swamps the parsonage, the high jagged tombstones lined up in wildly slanting rows that record the town's body count. Typhoid, cholera, and tuberculosis plagued Haworth in the 19th century, and more than 40 percent of children died before the age of six. Their short lives are etched everywhere in the sprawling graveyard. One tombstone features the names of six babies, all lost to a stonemason father who sculpted a sleeping child, resting its tiny doomed head on a tasseled pillow, at the base of the grave.

Clearly the Brontë sisters were sketching from life when they wrote of death. Maybe they glimpsed their own fate, too. Emily Brontë would be laid to rest beneath the bleak town church at the age of 30.

Ann Dinsdale, the collections manager of the Brontë Parsonage Museum, explains to me later that the local drinking water flowed from moorland spring to village wells and pumps by way of the cemetery grounds. Historians link that tainted water to Haworth's high death rate. "The Brontës had their own private well," Dinsdale notes, "but since the parsonage is bordered on two sides by the churchyard, it's possible there was contamination to their drinking water, too."

The home, now owned by the Brontë Society, doesn't offer much relief. As I trail through the dim rooms, I can't help but feel a little claustrophobic, especially in the tiny dining room where the three sisters wrote, sharing space at a small central table. "They would walk around the dining table every evening discussing their writing," Dinsdale says.

It isn't until I step outside, into the ocean of wild grass, that I breathe freely again. It's easy to imagine Emily's ecstasy, embodied by the unfettered passion of her characters Heathcliff and Catherine, when she broke loose on these moors.

By dusk the town shuts down, so I escape 11 miles north to the Devonshire Arms Country House Hotel & Spa, a coaching inn at Bolton Abbey that dates to the early 17th century. Everything here is a British comedy in comparison: my guest room anchored by a canopy bed; my late afternoon tea complete with scones; and the dog lounge, an ode to the English love of all things canine. Portraits of terriers hang near the fireplace like furry pinups, and the flocked wallpaper is stamped with silhouettes of Labradors and poodles. "One night recently,"



Founded by 13 monks in 1132, Fountains Abbey survives as one of England's most significant Cistercian ruins.







It's easy to see how the Yorkshire landscape whipped up the vivid imaginations of its residents. The tumble of low hills and moor meadows conjures a sense of roiling drama.



head concierge Eddie Styles tells me, "we had ten dogs here."

Still, it takes more than leaving Haworth to escape Yorkshire's ghosts, which I realize the next morning when Styles starts talking again. "One bedroom here is always a bit cold, and a lot of guests ask about footsteps, although there is no room above them," he says. "Some say it's the ghost of a little girl lost on the moors, looking for some warmth."

She doesn't have to look far for companionship, as I learn when guide Alan Rowley picks me up for a marathon tour of the shire. Zigzagging all over the moors and dales, we can't seem to outrun the wraiths. Nearly every cottage, village, and landmark harbors its own tall tale or apparition.

Rowley, who sold his pub in York to pursue an interest in local history, has heard all the legends over the years. "People in Yorkshire are natural-born storytellers," he says as we drive 28 miles east, past the whimsical follies and water garden of Fountains Abbey, where a phantom choir of monks is said to chant at night.

Forty miles farther east we pass Castle Howard. Here in 1940, the collapse of the home's central dome was a chilling forewarning; two sons of the family would be killed in action in World War II, joining Yorkshire's long line of lost youth. Finally arriving at the North York Moors National Park, we circle a squat block of stone on Danby High Moor that appears to have a head.

"That's Fat Betty," Rowley says, pointing to what looks like Yorkshire's own combination Easter Island head and wife of Lot. "She dates back centuries and is said to be a farmer's wife who got lost on the foggy moor and turned to stone. But Betty still has to eat, and if you stop and feed her, it's considered good luck."

As I size up the pile of lollipops and chocolate bars littering the ground (in spite of park officials discouraging the tradition), I can't help but think that what Betty could really use, after standing sentry so long, is a sleeping pill. Her blank white face stares, fixed, over the moors.

At least she scans an evocative view. As we continue east, it's easy to see how the Yorkshire landscape whipped up the vivid imaginations of its residents. The tumble of low hills and moor meadows conjures a sense of roiling drama. Curving rows of ancient dry limestone walls trail like lacework through fields. Stranded villages, a duet of sandstone and slate, suddenly rise from the rocky ground and, just as quickly, melt back down into the stippled light.

At Helmsley the scene cheers up. A quintessential moorland market town, it exhibits the three laws of nearly every Yorkshire village: People come attached to a dog (Labs and terriers preferred), tearooms frame a cobbled square, and the bakeries sell "millionaire shortbread" (cookie squares layered with caramel and topped with chocolate). But only a few miles out of town, when we stop for dinner at the Star Inn, the mood darkens again.

"I was born in Whitby," says Andrew Pern, part of a growing crop of chefs who have turned Yorkshire into a serious dining destination. "We would go up to the abbey as kids and play hide-and-seek among the graves. We didn't like to show we were afraid, but when someone didn't come out..."

I had delayed my visit to Whitby—aka Dracula's home—in order to finish my trip on a high note of macabre melodrama. At dinner, Pern's black pudding and foie gras had distracted me from his warnings. But lying in bed that night at Swinton Park, a stately home turned hotel run by a baronial family, I can't shake the image of the abbey graveyard.

PERCHED ON THE EDGE of the craggy Yorkshire coastline, the horseshoe town of Whitby rises in stony layers to the cemetery of St. Mary's Church and the arched ruins of the seventh-century Whitby Abbey. In the soft midday light, the town looks like the ready-made cover of a horror novel. Bram Stoker chose this as his setting for *Dracula* while summering in a guesthouse across the harbor from the abbey in August 1890.

In fact, the original edition of *Dracula,* published in 1897, follows local geography so closely you could still map the area through a reading of the novel. The vampire's ship, the *Demeter,* runs aground at the sands of Tate Hill. At the cemetery of St. Mary's Church, the parched Dracula sinks his teeth into the doomed, sleepwalking heroine, Lucy Westenra.

And fictional protagonist Mina Murray, Lucy's friend, climbs the real church stairs to the graveyard just in time to see a gruesome sight: "...My knees trembled...something raised a head...a white face and red, gleaming eyes."

I walk up all 199 wide stone steps panting, weak-kneed myself, to the church. Then I walk back down into the lap of the town, which makes a thriving living off its Dracula pedigree. I pass the Boo Tique boutique as well as shops hawking chocolate coffins and skull bracelets. Such souvenirs sell out during the town's regular goth festivals, when a whole Drac Pack of revelers dressed as vampires, zombies, and ghouls mobs Whitby.

It's all in the details (opposite): Pooches are top dog at Devonshire Arms Country House (top left). Harome's Star Inn and restaurant brandishes its English country setting, from fresh-baked bread (top center) to locally hunted pheasants lined up for dinner (bottom). Gothic style lives on in Whitby (top right).



"It used to be underground, but now everyone comes," Elaine Horton tells me, standing in her Pandemonium goth shop surrounded by satin corsets and vampire T-shirts as she runs her fingers through her blue hair. "I'm not sure why."

I can only guess. Climbing the steps to the church one last time at dusk, I end up back in a cemetery, a fitting bookend to my trip's first graveyard, at Haworth. It occurs to me that maybe the high gothic tales, with all their vampires and ghosts, resonate so strongly now because they allow us to fantasize in an age when so many of our stories, blog posts, and tweets have become prosaic. Or maybe it's because the best horror stories capture something profound: the bogeyman under the bed, our unnamed fears, an elegiac sense of inevitable loss.

Whatever the reason, some constants remain. Whitby's tile roofs, glowing red in the sinking sun, look firmly rooted in place. So does the old gothic road, as it carries all those stories down to the North Sea below—only to be churned up by the waves and swept back, again, to the shore.

Wisconsin-based contributor **RAPHAEL KADUSHIN** *wrote about Tel Aviv, Israel, in the October 2013 issue of* Traveler. **JOHN KERNICK** *photographed a road trip across New Jersey ("Garden State Variety") in the October 2015 issue.*

NG MAPS; PARKS DATA FROM THE WORLD DATABASE ON PROTECTED AREAS (WDPA)



Since the 12th century, the cemetery of St. Mary's Church has crowned the seaside town of Whitby.



A country lane in North Yorkshire

TOP TEN

YORKSHIRE, ENGLAND

VAMP IT UP Climb the 199 steps to St. Mary's Church, above Whitby, then continue on to the medieval Whitby Abbey, which tells the story of Bram Stoker's time at these ruins.

GO FOR BAROQUE Explore the grounds and gardens of Castle Howard, 15 miles northeast of York. The opulent 18th-century home served as the setting for the 1981 TV series and 2008 film adaptation of Evelyn Waugh's 1945 novel, *Brideshead Revisited*.

GET LIT Pay homage to the authors of *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* at the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth. Follow the footpath winding through the moors outside for a sense of the environment that inspired the imaginative sisters.

LOCAL SPIRITS

The Golden Fleece

Get spooked at the most haunted pub in England's most haunted city, York.

ENGLISH PASTORAL

Devonshire Arms

Retreat to this hotel in the heart of the Dales, with a spa, hiking trails, and fly-fishing. From $262.

SWEET DREAMS

The Ruin

Live out gothic fantasies while sleeping in a restored Georgian folly in North Yorkshire. From $115.

SHOPPING

Barnsley Market

While browsing this 700-year-old market, try the fat rascal, a local type of fruit scone.



Magpie Café

UNDER THE INFLUENCE In Haworth, order a pint at the Black Bull, Branwell Brontë's regular pub—just across the street from the apothecary where the only Brontë son bought his opium.

STAR POWER Yorkshire boasts more Michelin stars than any other part of England, outside of London. At Harome's Star Inn, chef/owner Andrew Pern serves modern takes on regional cooking.

LOCAL FLAVOR

Catch of the Day

Join the line out the door at the Magpie Café in Whitby. The warren of rooms overlooks the lively harbor, but the real draw is the classic fish-and-chips (haddock or cod). "Our secret," says chef Paul Gildroy, "is the light, crisp batter recipe passed down for 75 years, through three generations of the same family."

JOHN KERNICK (BOTH PHOTOS)

10 Places to See NOW

The climate is changing—and with it, many of our favorite destinations.

ICE IS MELTING. SEAS ARE RISING. DROUGHTS are lasting longer in some places; storms are becoming more fierce and frequent in others. All around the world, climate change and other environmental factors are changing the places we love.

Tourism is a big part of the climate change problem—globally, annual air travel emits as much world-warming carbon as 136 million cars—but it can also be part of the solution. Travel dollars are a major source of income for residents of many affected places (the tourism sector in the low-lying Maldives alone is worth more than $2 billion). The money brought by visitors not only provides locals with a living but can also help their governments pay for projects to build resilience to climate change.



RODGER KLEIN/VWPICS/REDUX



A blue-spotted puffer fish navigates corals on Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

Great Barrier Reef

A CHANGING OCEAN

(PREVIOUS PAGES) MANY DIFFERENT factors threaten Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Warming water temperatures cause a condition called bleaching that weakens and can kill coral. Ocean acidification makes corals more fragile, and stronger cyclones break up these weakened reefs.

Why to see it now: Australia's Institute of Marine Science says the reef has lost half of its coral cover over the past 30 years. Should current trends continue, irreversible damage may occur within a few decades.

Joshua Tree National Park

DROUGHT

EVEN A DESERT can get too dry. In Joshua Tree National Park, the three-year California drought is stressing the namesake Joshua trees (which are not trees at all, but a species of yucca) native to the Mojave Desert. What little rain that falls in the region evaporates quickly in the heat, causing seedlings to shrivel.

Why to see it now: If California's drought conditions persist, 90 percent of the Joshua tree's current range across the 800,000-acre park may no longer be able to support the plant's growth.



Joshua Tree National Park, California



Grey Glacier in Torres del Paine National Park, Chile

90%

of Joshua Tree National Park might no longer be suitable for growth of Joshua trees if California's drought conditions continue.

PETER MATHER, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE (JOSHUA TREES); IGNACIO PALACIOS/LONELY PLANET IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES (GLACIER)

Patagonia

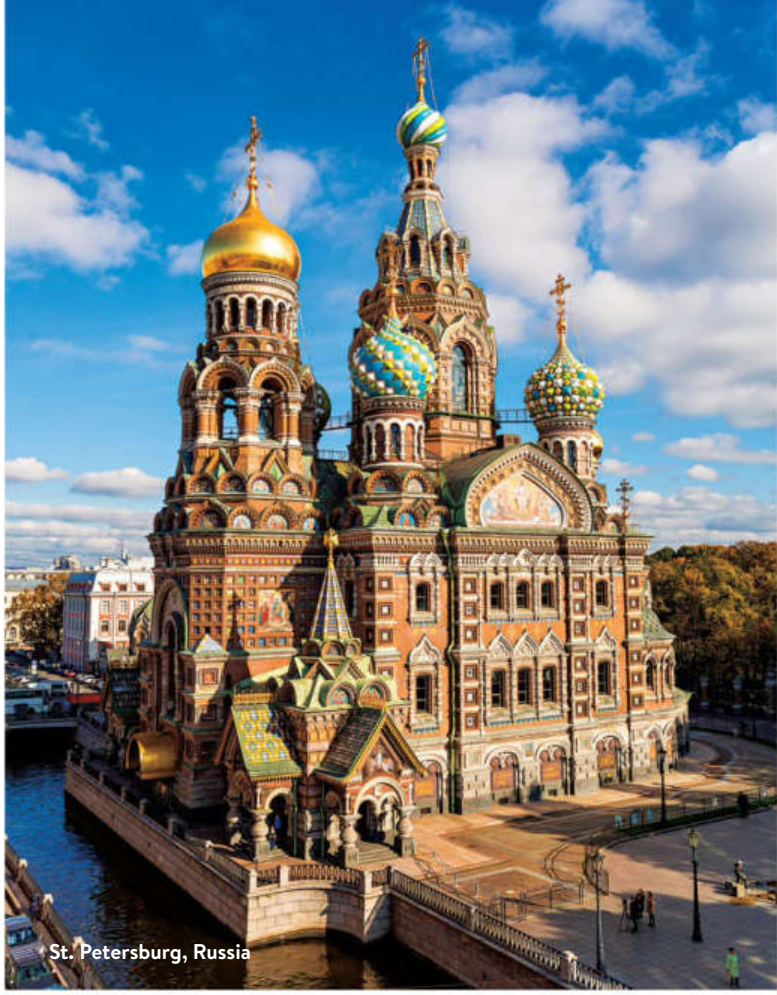
MELTING GLACIERS

THE GREAT PATAGONIAN ice fields of Chile and Argentina are shrinking. Their annual rates of reduction, even in the Andes' frigid highest altitudes, have accelerated over the past ten years.

Why to see it now: Temperatures in the Andes are on the rise. Satellite photos show that many of the region's glaciers shrink visibly from year to year. Experts say that a quarter of the ice volume of Patagonian glaciers could be lost by 2100. Some glaciers may vanish altogether.



Vietnam's rice fields



St. Petersburg, Russia



Europe's Alps



Chan Chan, Peru

25%

of floods in St. Petersburg's 300-year history have happened in the past 15 years.

Mekong Delta

SALTWATER INTRUSION

SEASONAL FLOODING in Vietnam's Mekong Delta is a vital part of growing rice, the region's major crop. Salt water pushed inland by recent droughts endangers agricultural areas fed by the Mekong River.

Why to see it now: Without intervention, more than a third of the delta could be underwater in less than a century. For now, low-tech preventive measures include planting mangroves and earthen dikes to help keep the sea back. Some farmers are also switching from rice cultivation to raising shrimp, which thrive in salt water.

St. Petersburg, Russia

FLOODING

THIS HISTORIC CITY on Russia's Neva River has always been prone to floods. Now surging waters on the nearby Gulf of Finland's Neva Bay and increased rainfall are making the problem worse. About one quarter of all floods in the city's 300-year history have occurred in the past 15 years.

Why to see it now: Though a massive flood-control infrastructure is in place to prevent major damage from a storm surge, areas of the city's downtown sit only slightly above sea level, and must regularly deal with high water.

The Alps

LESS SNOW

THE WARMING has already started in the European Alps. Ski areas in some regions are investing in snow machines and removable covers to protect their valuable slopes. All Alpine countries will not bear the brunt equally: Resorts in Switzerland and France, where the mountains are highest, will likely fare better than those at lower altitudes in Germany and Austria.

Why to see it now: A 2014 Austrian government report says that warming in the Alps has accelerated since 1980, and temperatures could increase more than 3 percent by 2100.

Chan Chan, Peru

EROSION

THE ADOBE CITY known as Chan Chan was once capital of the Chimú empire and the largest city in the pre-Columbian world. Now intricate details on the Peruvian complex's mud-brick buildings that have survived centuries are being scoured away by increased rainfall—a function of warming Pacific waters—along the coast.

Why to see it now: Rain is cracking Chan Chan's ancient walls. Preservationists have scrambled to construct roofs and drainage systems to protect the World Heritage site from more frequent El Niño-related torrents.

PIERRE ARSENAULT/MASTERFILE/CORBIS (MEKONG); GAVIN HELLIER/AWL IMAGES (ST. PETERSBURG); STEFANO TORRIONE/SIME/ESTOCK PHOTO (CHAN CHAN); MICHAEL TRUELOVE/GETTY IMAGES (ALPS)

30%

drop in population of Churchill polar bears has occurred over the past 30 years.

Churchill, Manitoba

LESS ICE TO GO AROUND

EVERY AUTUMN the polar bears show up in Churchill, Manitoba, to wait for Hudson Bay to freeze. Churchill is the gateway to their hunting grounds. The bears will winter far out on the sea ice to feast on seals, then head back to land where they fast as the summer melt begins. These days the freeze starts later and the melt comes sooner. The bears spend 30 more days on land than they did 30 years ago.

Why to see it now: At the current sea ice depletion rate of about 13 percent per decade, some two-thirds of the polar bear population could be lost by 2050.



THOMAS KOKTA/GETTY IMAGES



A polar bear mother and cubs explore frozen Hudson Bay.

Maldives

SEA LEVEL RISE

MOST OF THIS INDIAN OCEAN archipelago's hundreds of scattered islands and atolls sit just a few feet above sea level. The Maldives is the lowest-lying nation in the world and also one of the most vulnerable to climate change. The country's former president, famously concerned about what would happen once the ocean waters rise on the islands, proposed moving the entire population of 350,000 to Australia.

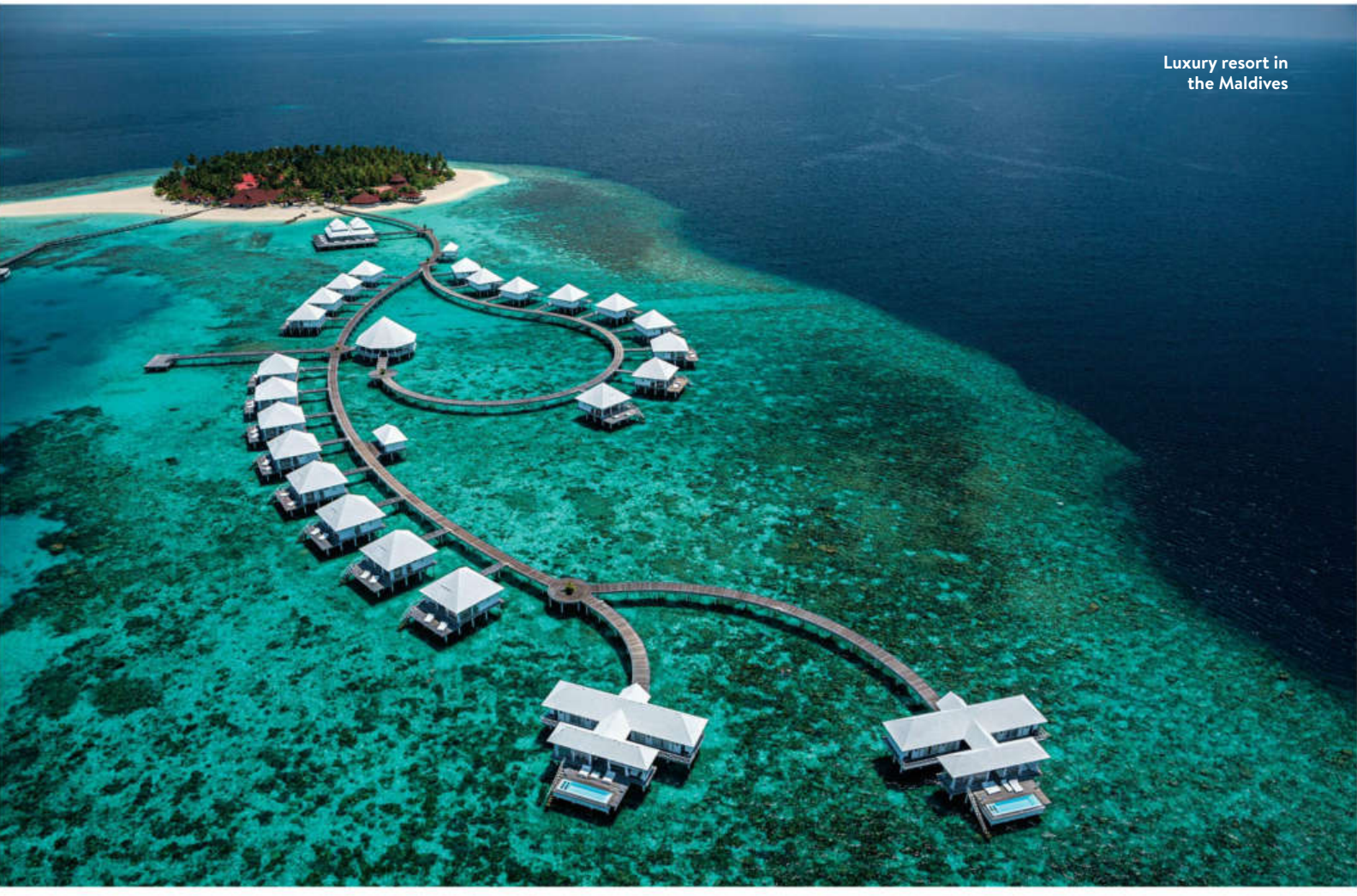
Why to see it now: Scientists predict that 77 percent of the Maldives may be underwater by the end of this century.

Rocky Mountain National Park

CHANGING PLANT LIFE

ONE OF THE LARGEST EXPANSES of alpine tundra in the United States is located in Colorado's Rocky Mountain National Park—but for how much longer? Scientists say the park's tree line could creep up its mountains 250 feet for every future degree of warming, crowding out tundra meadows as it moves. One tree that might not make the journey is the aspen, which is more stressed by heat and drought than hardier conifers.

Why to see it now: A recent report predicted that more than half the aspen stands in the Central Rockies could be gone by 2060.



Luxury resort in the Maldives



Aspens in Rocky Mountain National Park

GEORGE STEINMETZ/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE (MALDIVES); DAN BALLARD/AURORA PHOTOS (ASPEN)

SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

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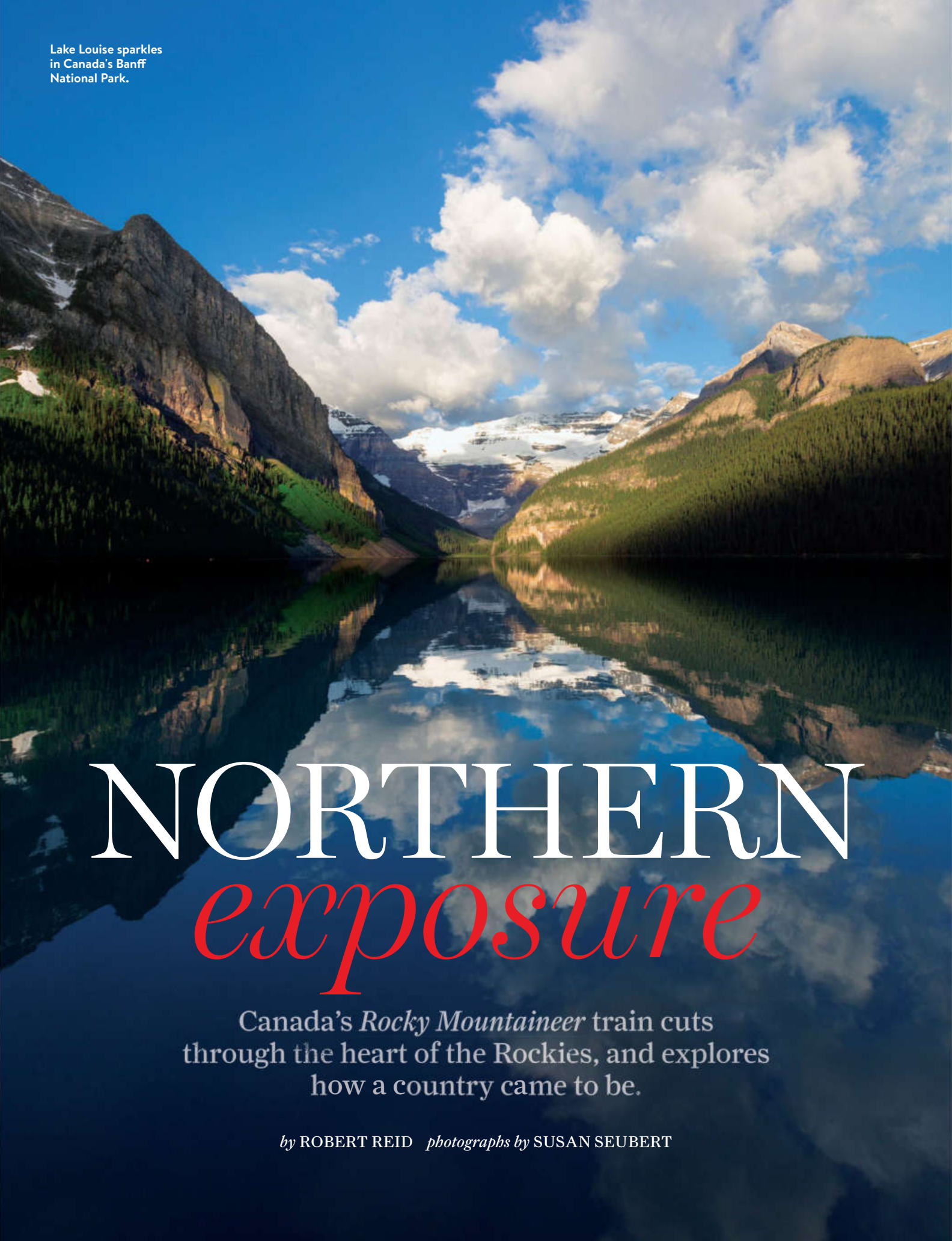
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Lake Louise sparkles in Canada's Banff National Park.

NORTHERN *exposure*

Canada's *Rocky Mountaineer* train cuts through the heart of the Rockies, and explores how a country came to be.

by ROBERT REID *photographs by* SUSAN SEUBERT

The next step up Mount Norquay requires a

lunge of faith. Looking over my sunglasses, slipping in sweat, I see I must now go left and out, across an outcrop of rock that juts some 200 feet above nothingness. I look at my red knuckles, gripping the tiny iron rungs bolted on the face of the cliff, and utter an expletive. (My mind knows I'm safely harnessed and tethered, but my body doesn't believe a word of it.) I swing my left foot across the brittle rock, landing it on an inch-shallow ledge. I stay like that, hanging on, straddling a mountain face outside Banff in the Canadian Rockies, as close to spread-eagle as my 47-year-old frame gets.



Wait, wasn't I supposed to be on a train trip?

It started that way. In three days, I got to Banff from my home in Portland, Oregon, partly by rail. It's not only a gorgeous ride, cutting across the snow-capped Rockies and river gorges, but also a historic one.

Sir John Macdonald, Canada's beloved first prime minister, built the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880s to turn Canada into a unified, transcontinental nation. Eventually it spawned the country's national park system, opened up the mountains to tourism, and led to the development of Canada's first luxury hotels. The only way to traverse the historic railway's most rugged stretches is the *Rocky Mountaineer,* a luxury excursion train from Seattle to Banff (with overnight stops in Vancouver and Kamloops). That gives plenty of opportunity to consider the essence of Canada. Oh, yes, and dine on three-course meals while sipping Okanagan Valley wines.

U.S. AND CANADIAN flags stand on either side of the *Rocky Mountaineer*'s eight cars in Seattle, as I—and about 150 others—board the train. Soon the rails take us alongside Puget Sound, where we pass stacks of crab pots on the water and barns labeled "APPLE" and "CIDER." By the time we pass the "Peace Arch," built on the two nations' border, passengers have loosened up. When we chug toward Vancouver's glittering glass skyline, a father of a family from Mumbai breaks into a lullaby. The 60-something couple from Boston across the aisle asks what it says.

"It means, 'I love you, but don't make me wait.'"

I CHECK INTO the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver, then rush off to a downtown bar above a 7-Eleven. Opened as a members-only club for (male) Canadian Pacific railway workers in 1931, the Railway Club is now a music venue with worn wood floors, a small stage area, a nook for darts, and a hidden lounge. It's Friday, it's busy. And not everyone is sober.

I'm listening to an indie music band playing from the bar. "Did you know this is where k.d. lang got her break?" a woman next to me asks. I didn't. Samantha Kuryliak, an Ontario expat and off-duty bartender, says new bands begin here, and she loves it because all sorts of people come. "I have one regular who has

Rocky Mountain high: Wide windows (left) let in the spectacular views; the *Rocky Mountaineer* passenger train (right) chugs along the Bow River through the province of Alberta.


ROCKY MOUNTAINEER
8011



The way of the West: Built by the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Lake Agnes Tea House near Lake Louise offers rest for weary hikers (above). Rungs on the *via ferrata* on Mount Norquay allow recreational climbers to reach the summit.

come three times a week for 30 years. He's 75."

We have a full day to explore Vancouver, so in the morning, I hop on a free shuttle to the Capilano Suspension Bridge, Vancouver's most popular attraction. It was built from hemp rope and cedar shortly after the railway reached town. First Nations groups called it the "laughing bridge" for the sounds the wind made whipping through its loose planks. It's sturdier now, running 450 feet above a canyon and leading to elevated walkways between 250-year-old Douglas firs.

Later, from the former CPR train station, a neoclassic building now serving as a SeaBus ferry terminal, I cab it to Yaletown. It's there I find a 19th-century roundhouse, constructed to service trains. It's home to Engine 374, the first train to pull into town (in 1887).

Inside, Craig McDowall, a gray-haired volunteer with a handlebar mustache, has been a train spotter since he was five. He played on the 374 as a kid when it was stationed in Kitsilano Park. Misreading me as a fellow train aficionado, McDowall calls up some steam engine videos on his laptop, then points me to the steps of the steam engine cab to pull the whistle. "Go on," he says with a nod. I don't think I have a choice, so I step forward, pull a cord, and reward myself—and a couple of Texan visitors loitering nearby—with a bellow that echoes across the brick floor.



EARLY THE NEXT morning, the *Rocky Mountaineer* has expanded into a 23-car train for more than 600 passengers. A bagpiper, dutifully kilted, offers a brief sign-off, as we all board and head east into a scene that looks like an ending shot of an early *Lord of the Rings* film: an impossible barrier of rocky peaks. Over the next two days, we will take them, and many more, as we cross the girth of British Columbia's canyons, cliffs, snowy summits, and green meadows of sedge where, we're told, black bears like to dine in full view of the passing train.

A half hour out of Vancouver, the sun streams through the clear roof of the top-deck panorama car. I watch as we pass cranberry farms and raw logs stored on rivers, while the vista gradually narrows, with spruce and pine trees and exposed rock walls edging closer to our windows. At Yale, I search for—and miss—a diminutive memorial to the thousands of Chinese workers who helped build the railway.

For most of the morning we've been following the "Mighty Fraser," watching the river transform from a peaceful, frosty green into, as Hugh MacLennan describes it in *Seven Rivers of Canada,* the "most savage river of the continent." In its 854 miles, it drains an area of 85,000 square miles with melting snow and debris from seemingly lifeless peaks. The Fraser rumbles down the canyons, pouring through the tight Hell's Gate and swallowing whole rivers that join it. I don't want to kayak that thing.

After an overnight stop in Kamloops, a historic trading town on the Thompson River, we're off again. At Craigellachie, I spot the marker for the last spike, marking the end of the CPR construction in 1885.

But it's the last five hours of the three-day ride that steal the show. Wide patches of woods climb in green waves up rocky bluffs whose mountaintops are coated in snow. Soon we enter a tunnel, looping on a dark path shaped like a cursive *L,* then pop out again to find the familiar mountain landmarks have been inverted. We enter another tunnel and reappear in British Columbia, near the Continental Divide. Rolling under mountain peaks, the train cuddles up alongside the delicious banks of the blue-green Bow River. I join others in the open-air vestibule, snapping photos, until we pull into Banff. It's been a 28-hour ride from Seattle.

THE BANFF SPRINGS HOTEL is a castle-style hotel that dates to 1888, when rail execs set up railway hotels like this. The next day, visiting Banff's Whyte Museum, I read that the second CPR president, William Cornelius Van Horne, said, "If we can't export the scenery, we'll import the tourists."

Photos there also show early surveyors with pickaxes who climbed peaks to plot the future course of the CPR. Eventually they discovered the springs that made Banff Springs famous and spawned the Alpine Club of Canada, founded in 1906 and run by Swiss guides. So, all of this started with bearded men in suspenders climbing mountains. I hate heights, but I had to try. Chucky Gerard, wearing a sprout of red hair dangling off his chin, teaches mountaineering classes and leads first-timers like me up Mount Norquay, a ski mountain that opened the *via ferrata* (a course of bolted steel cables) last summer. He's also something of a psychologist, with his words of affirmation and encouragement.

Whatever. They work, and he gets me to cross the feared chasm. At the top, the wind whips around in a refreshing way. I hear a long, distant whistle. I look down to spot a 100-car freight train passing through.

It takes a lot to build a railway, I'm realizing. Or a Canada.

ROBERT REID *lives in Portland, Oregon. Photographer* **SUSAN SEUBERT** *splits her time between Oregon and Hawaii.*

NG MAPS; PARKS DATA FROM WDPA



Glacier-fed Peyto Lake is located in Banff National Park in the Canadian Rockies.



A *Rocky Mountaineer* staffer greets passengers.

PLANNING YOUR TRIP

ALL ABOARD

Railroads have played a big part in Rocky Mountain history, so sit back, relax, and enjoy the storytelling as the *Rocky Mountaineer* takes you through miles of spectacular scenery, making overnight stops in both quaint towns and iconic cities. Each of the train's four routes (right) offers its own distinctive adventure; all packages have customizable luxury options.

SERVICE Guests select from two classes of service, each offering gourmet dining, comfortable hotel accommodations, wide window panoramas, and outdoor or open-air viewing.

CUISINE Enjoy regional wines and fresh, local ingredients—wild Pacific salmon, Alberta beef, and seasonal fruits and vegetables—in dishes (right) prepared by innovative chefs.

ACCOMMODATIONS Unwind at the end of an exhilarating day in style at a fine hotel, such as the Four Seasons in Vancouver or the Fairmont in Banff Springs.



WILDLIFE Watch for these wild creatures while on your train journey: bear, elk, deer, moose, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, bald eagles, and ospreys.

WHEN TO GO Most *Rocky Mountaineer* trips are offered April through October.

Got to *rockymountaineer.com* to plan your trip.

SUSAN SEUBERT (BOTH PHOTOS)

COASTAL PASSAGE

Seattle-Vancouver-Canadian Rockies

Delight in the ocean air and views along the Pacific Northwest coast. Then head onward and upward into the mountains.

JOURNEY THROUGH THE CLOUDS

Vancouver-Kamloops-Jasper

Start in the cosmopolitan city of Vancouver, then journey beside raging rivers, glacier-fed lakes, and picturesque waterfalls en route to Jasper National Park.

FIRST PASSAGE TO THE WEST

Vancouver-Kamloops-Lake Louise/Banff

Explore Canada's pioneering past on the only train to retrace this historic western route through the wilderness of the Rockies.

RAINFOREST TO GOLD RUSH

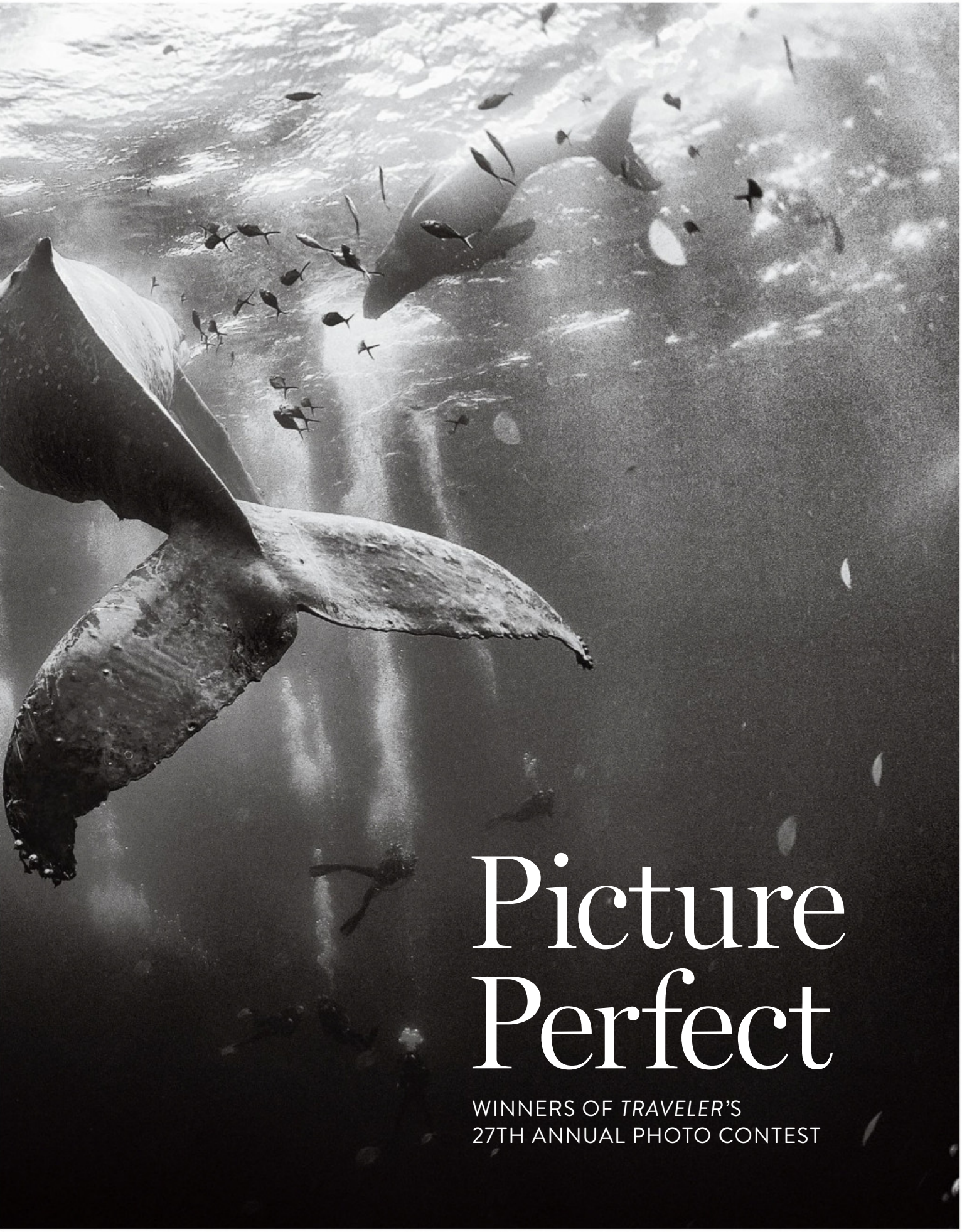
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FIRST PLACE

A whale and her calf captivate lens-toting divers in Mexico's Revillagigedo Archipelago.



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FIRST PLACE

"WHALE WHISPERERS" (OPENING PAGES)
ANUAR PATJANE FLORIUK

A humpback whale and her calf draw the attention of divers around Roca Partida, one of four islands in the Revillagigedo Archipelago, off the Pacific coast of **Mexico.** "It was a sort of 'mammal party' of whales and humans in a unique place," says Mexican native Anuar Patjane, who took the photo on a dive trip. "This archipelago is full of pelagic life and deserves to be a World Heritage site to increase protection against illegal fishing. We see and care when a forest is gone because it's visible to us, but we don't see when we destroy life underwater. Maybe my photo will help."

"I loved the dreamlike quality of light and the many details in this image," says *Traveler* Editor in Chief Maggie Zackowitz. "The tiny floating divers lend a sense of scale to the mother humpback swimming in the center, while the bubbles and the smaller fish help frame the scene."

PRIZE An eight-day National Geographic Photo Expedition for two to Costa Rica and the Panama Canal





SECOND PLACE

"THROUGH A LOOKING GLASS"
FAISAL AZIM

A resident of Chittagong, the second largest city in **Bangladesh,** Faisal Azim has taken to chronicling the urban landscapes of his hometown.

"These three laborers were looking out a window at their workplace, where stone is crushed into gravel. A heavy dew the previous night caused the powder from the crushed stone to smear, creating the effect of a painting."

The grit on the window adds texture to the shot, says contest judge and National Geographic Travel senior producer for photography Sarah Polger. "It creates a layered image that makes the viewer want to learn more about these men."

Azim notes he had little time to get the photo. "Within two minutes the supervisor rushed the men back to work. Maybe it was that hurried situation that helped make this a good picture."

PRIZE A six-day National Geographic Photo Expedition for two to Yellowstone National Park

THIRD PLACE

"OFF TO THE RACES"
AHMED AL TOQI

Two Bedouin riders and their camels kick up sand during a race on a desert track in **Oman.**

"We call this a camel *ardah,* or dance," says Oman-born photographer Ahmed Al Toqi. "It's a traditional style of camel racing, between two camels controlled by expert riders. The faster camel is the loser, so the riders—here a father and his son—try to run the camels at the same speed."

Al Toqi grabbed the image near the Wilayat Bidiyah oasis, in an area known as A'Sharqiyah Sands, for centuries a homeland of the Bedouin. "These races show the beauty and strength of Arabian camels—and the skills of their Bedouin riders. The look of concentration on the riders' faces shows the focus needed to succeed in this highly hazardous sport; a camel's reactions are unpredictable. This made me very careful, since I was so close."

PRIZE A six-day cruise for two on one of two Maine windjammer schooners, *Heritage* and *American Eagle*



MERIT AWARDS

EDUARD GUTESCU

"Romania is a land of fairy tales," says Eduard Gutescu, who lives in its capital city, Bucharest, and often photographs his homeland's rural areas. "This picture shows the countryside around the village of Peştera, with frost whitening the trees."

"The frost adds a special dimension to this image," says contest judge and *Traveler* acting director of photography Carol Enquist. "It imparts a sense of otherworldliness, giving the scene the serenity of a land lost in time."

STEFANO ZARDINI

A man prepares to enter a high-altitude sauna in the Dolomites, in northern **Italy.** "I took this winter shot just west of the resort town of Cortina, on Mount Lagazuoi," says Italian photojournalist Stefano Zardini, who lives in Cortina. "I call it 'Sauna in the Sky.' I liked the contrast of the sauna's warm light and the cold blue around it." The sauna belongs to the Rifugio Lagazuoi, a mountain hostelry reachable by foot or cable car. "I hope," says Zardini, "the image conveys the beauty of my mountain region."

Merit winners receive a $200 gift certificate to B&H Photo (*www.bhphotovideo.com*), a matted and framed print of the photograph entered in the contest, and *The Art of Travel Photography* DVD course from National Geographic and The Great Courses.



ALAIN SCHROEDER

Two wrestlers in Kolhapur, a city in western **India,** rest after a workout. "They practice *kushti,* an Indian form of wrestling," explains Belgian photographer Alain Schroeder. Participants, called *pehlwans,* grapple in dirt pits. "After a bout, they cover themselves with earth to soak up perspiration, then massage each other to soothe muscles—and express mutual respect."



STÉFANE BÉRUBÉ

Vancouver-based Stéfane Bérubé spent a day at the Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary, in **Uganda,** trying to get an image of an endangered white rhino. "I skulked through the grass hoping for a photo, but with little luck. The following morning, however, I woke to these three white rhinos grazing right in front of me." Fourteen white rhinos currently enjoy the protection of the Ziwa sanctuary.











SARAH WOUTERS

"Two boys were trying to catch their pet duck in a stream in Nong Khai Province, in northern **Thailand,"** says Sarah Wouters, who captured the moment while exploring the area on a visit from the Thai capital, Bangkok. Watered by the Mekong River, Nong Khai Province attracts visitors with its picturesque forests, temples, riverside villages, and tropical waterfalls.

BARTŁOMIEJ JURECKI

A scythe and a pitchfork provided playful props for Krakow-based photojournalist Bartłomiej Jurecki in this photo of farmers working a field in southern **Poland.**

"Many Polish farmers continue the centuries-old tradition of using scythes and pitchforks to cut and sort hay," says Jurecki, whose work has taken him from the Balkans to Haiti. "This area, around the village of Rzepiska, is among my favorite places in the Tatra Mountains, the range that forms a natural boundary between Poland and Slovakia."

BETH McCARLEY

Desiccated relics of a once fertile land, camel thorn trees—some up to 900 years old—punctuate the Deadvlei, a sere clay pan ringed by dunes in **Namibia**'s Namib-Naukluft National Park.

"The moon was bright enough to illuminate the sand dunes, but the sky remained dark enough to see the Milky Way," says photographer Beth McCarley, whom you'll find behind a camera when she's not working at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. The two faint white splotches in the sky on the right side, she notes, are dwarf galaxies known as Magellanic Clouds.

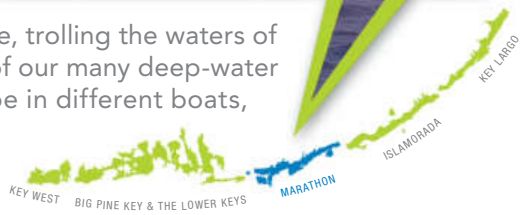
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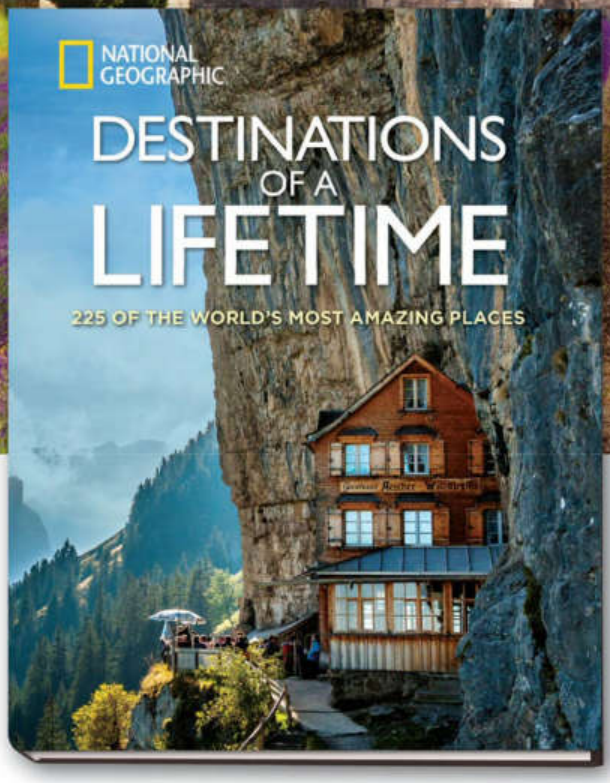
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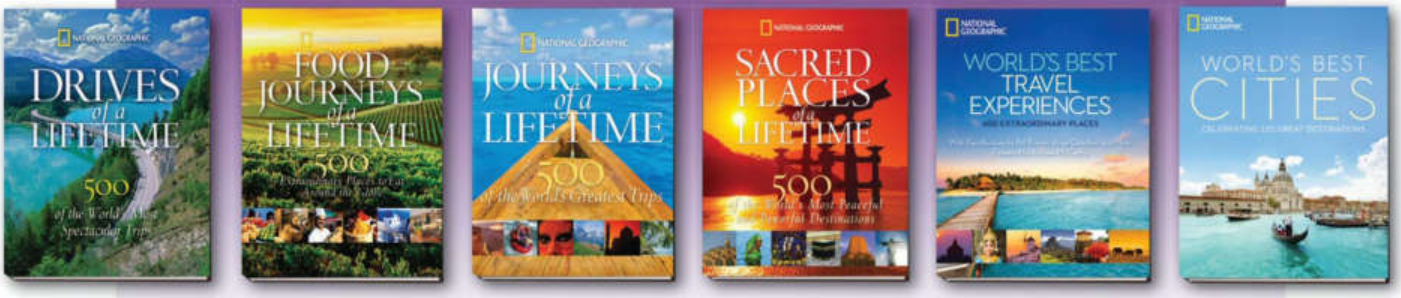
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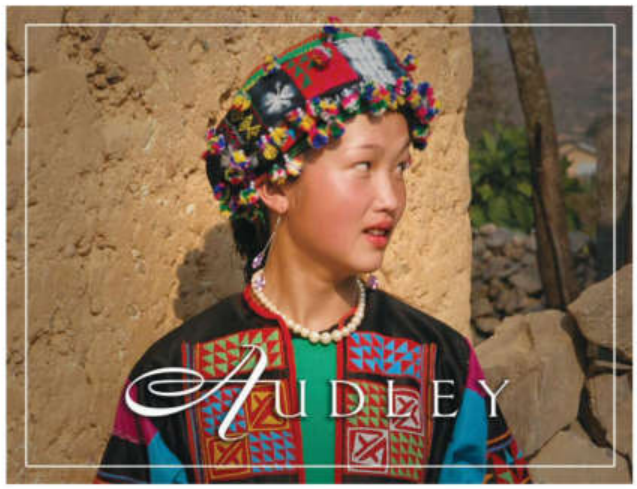


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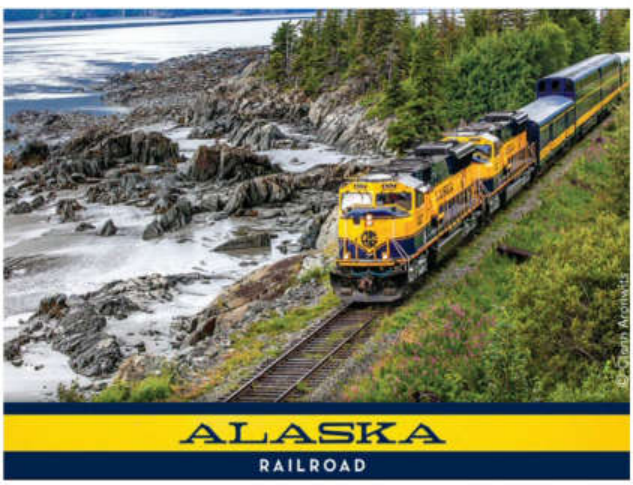
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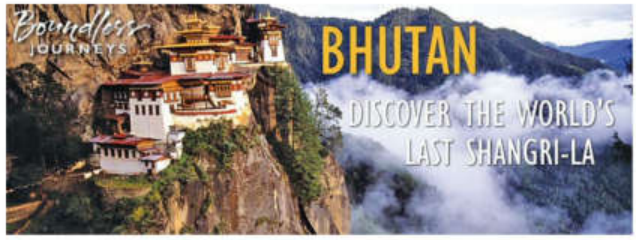
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KEITH BELLOWS (1951-2015)

A Traveler's Traveler

HE WAS BORN IN THE BELGIAN CONGO, attended prep school in Scotland, and followed it up with an Ivy League education (summa cum laude at Dartmouth). He was a sailor and an ice hockey player, a writer and a thinker. He sported the unruly gray mane and the rumpled look of an explorer always in a hurry. Keith Bellows, who helmed this magazine for 17 years until he stepped down in 2014, was a giant in the world of travel journalism. In a field marked by larger-than-life editors, he was as big as they come. He reveled in the printed word, yet he was one of the first to foresee the digital revolution, and he prepared the *Traveler* staff well for it. He called the ups and downs of the business a "Nantucket sleigh ride," and rode it gleefully. To contributing editor Andrew Nelson, Keith was a superb wordsmith, "who could spot a manuscript's strengths and flaws in a single read." To members of the travel industry, such as Kristian Jørgensen, CEO of Fjord Norway, he was a visionary "with the intuitive ability of seeing what was unique about a destination and finding the best way of communicating this." To our staff he was a champion of excellence as well as a fierce believer in the power of travel to change the world. He spent his last years working to give his children—Adam, Chase, and Mackenzie—and all children the transformative gift of travel.

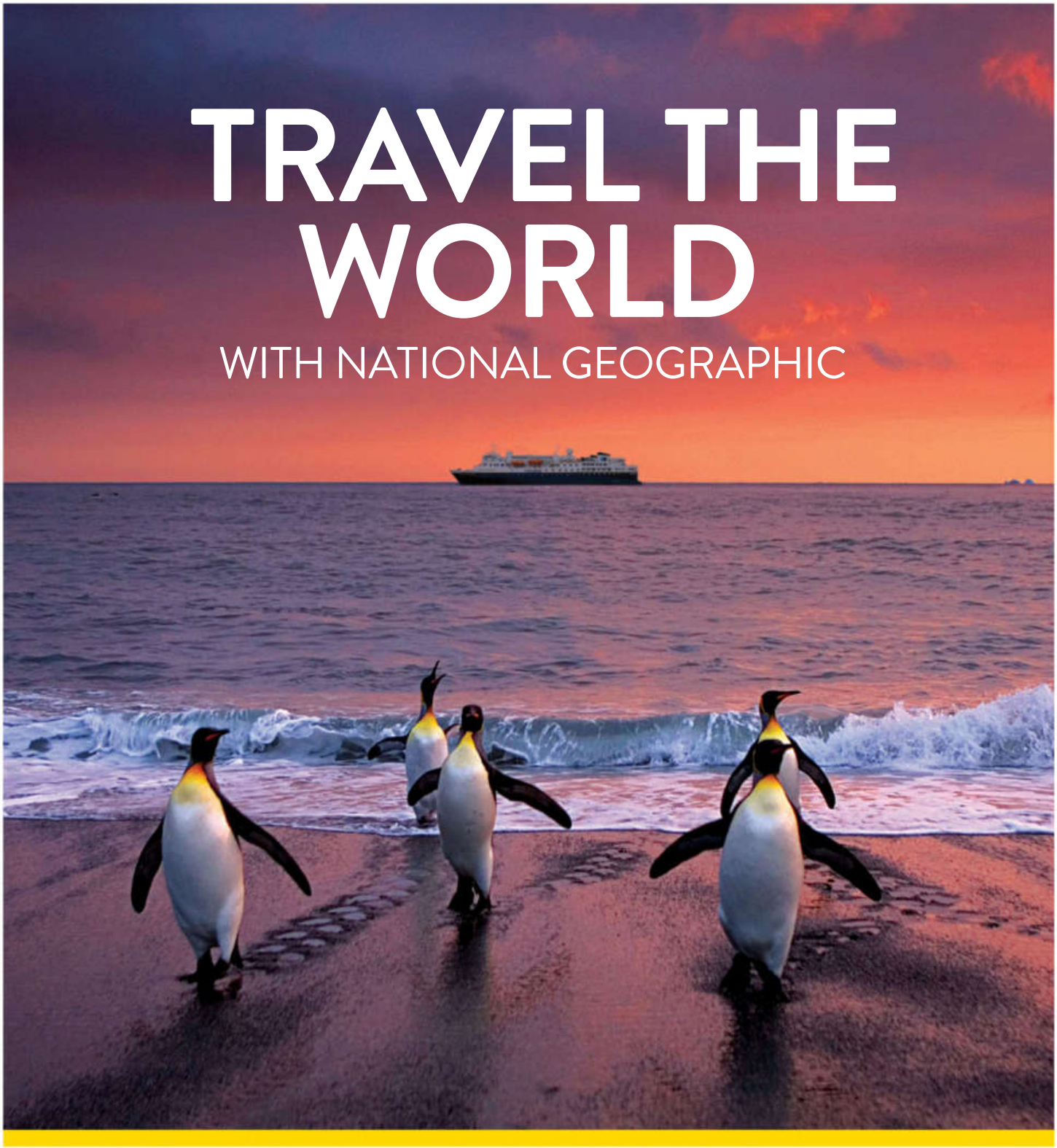
—NORIE QUINTOS, EXECUTIVE EDITOR



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